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GUEST
THE ONE EYED

By Gunnar Gunnarsson

A NOVEL of Iceland of today
that moves against a back-
ground of sombre and foreboding
beauty with a rapidity of action
and an unusual amount of sus-
pense. Translated from the Dan-
ish by

THIS novel, published originally in Denmark in four volumes, is generally regarded as the author's most important work to date. It deals with the adventures of three generations: Orlygur the Rich, a survivor of the age of heroic sagas; Ormaar who courts success only to find it dross; Guest the repentant sinner, a character akin perhaps to the Wandering Jew; and finally Orlygur the second a tempestuous adventuresome youth. Gunnarsson succeeds conspicuously in weaving into his chapters some of the beauty and magic of his native land, lovely and forbidding by turns, and the charm and simplicity of its people.

GUNNAR GUNNARSSON

born in 1889 in Iceland, learned Danish in order to secure a wider audience. Just what this means is realized when it is remembered that Icelandic is as different from Danish as Latin is from French. Icelandic—the ancient language of Scandinavia—is learned by very few Danes, and Icelanders find difficulty in speaking the guttural Danish. Gunnarsson's feat, therefore, is comparable to that of Joseph Conrad—the more so because Gunnarsson is now one of the most widely read authors of Denmark itself. He is the author of "The Sworn Brothers", published by Mr. Knopf last year.





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**GUEST THE
ONE-EYED**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SWORN BROTHERS

A TALE of the early days of Iceland by the most noted of living Icelandic novelists. "To read it is like being struck in the face on a sultry day with a breeze fresh from the glaciated mountains of the Viking North." —*The Bookman*.

"Gunnarsson has made his characters so genuine, so red-blooded and so masculine that they stand out like living men."

—*News-Tribune, Detroit*.

NEW YORK: ALFRED A. KNOPF

GUEST THE ONE-EYED

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH OF
GUNNAR GUNNARSSON
BY W. W. WORSTER



NEW YORK
ALFRED · A · KNOPF
1922

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[*Original title: AF BORGSLEGTENS HISTORIE*]

*Set up and printed by the Vail-Ballou Co., Binghamton, N. Y.
Paper furnished by W. F. Etherington & Co., New York, N. Y.
Bound by the H. Wolff Estate, New York, N. Y.*

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BOOK I

ORMARR ØRLYGSSON

CHAPTER I

S NOW, snow, snow!

Below and above—here, there, and everywhere! Up to his knees in snow, Pall à Seyru struggled across the wind-swept heights. The snow whirled down in great downy flakes, making it impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. Stooping, with heavy, weary steps, he tramped on, an empty sack slung across his shoulders.

He had come from the trading station, and was on his way home to his own hut in the mountains; the store-keeper had refused to grant him further credit, and in consequence, he had chosen to return by this lonely track across the hills, where he was sure of meeting no one on his way. It was hard to come home at Christmas-time with empty hands to empty pots and hungry mouths.

His only comfort was the snow. It fell so thickly as to shut out all around, and seemed to numb even the poor peasant's despair within the dismal prison of his mind.

Now and again he heard a sound—the whir and cackle of ptarmigan flying overhead.

Suddenly a gust of wind sent the snow flying over the ground. Another—and then gust followed gust, growing at last to a veritable hurricane, that swept the very snow-clouds from the sky. And as if by magic, a vast plain of snow lay open to his eyes.

All Hofsfjordur was suddenly visible. Pall turned, and saw the last of the clouds sweep down into the dark blue-green of the sea. To the south-east, the peaks of the Hof

Mountains rose out of the water, and over the eastern landscape towered a long range of rocky mountains that gradually merged into the great south-western plateau. His eye rested for a moment on the vicarage farm of Hof—a few straggling buildings clinging to the mountain-side, among which the black church itself loomed out, right at the mouth of the fjord. The houses of the trading station he could not see; they lay beyond, on the northern shore of the fjord, safely sheltered behind the rocky walls of the islets that offered such fine harbourage—to any ship that managed to reach so far.

The parish itself lay between him and the Hof Mountains. A valley two miles farther up was divided into two narrow dales by the Borgasfjall, a steep and rocky height. The rivulets from the two valleys—now but streaks of smooth ice—met lower down, making part of the valley into a peninsula. The southern stream was named Hofsa, and its valley Hofsardalur; the northernmost Borgara, and its valley Borgardalur; but the rivulets, from their confluence to the outflow into Hofsfjordur, still went by the name of Borgara, and the broad valley was called Borgardalur.

To the north, on the farther side of a narrow valley, likewise belonging to the parish, were the faint outlines of broad, slowly rising hills—the Dark Mountains. The ridge where Pall now stood was Borgarhals, and ran for a long way between Borgardalur and Nordurdalen, in the heart of the mountains, leading to the little glen where his cottage lay, close to a brook, and not far from the lake. There were trout in the water there, to be taken by net in summer, and in winter by fishing with lines through holes in the ice. Wild geese, swans, and ducks were there in plenty, from early spring to late autumn.

But Pall's thoughts had wandered far from all this, settling, as did his glance, on a row of stately gables that rose above a low hill in the centre of the peninsula, formed by the waters of Borgara and Hofsa.

From three of the chimneys a kindly smoke ascended.

The storm had abated, and folk were beginning to move about here and there among the outbuildings round the large walled farmyard. Already flocks of sheep were on their way to the winter pasture at the foot of the hills, where some dwarfed growth was still to be found.

This was Borg, the home of Ørlygur the Rich, as he was called. It was by no means uncommon for folk to speak of him as "the King," for he ruled over scores of servants, and owned hundreds of cattle and horses and thousands of sheep.

Suddenly Pall's cheeks flushed with a happy thought. It had crossed his mind that he might call at Borg. All knew that Ørlygur the Rich never sent a poor man empty away. But then he realized that today was not the first time the thought had come to him. No, better to give it up; he had turned for help to Borg too many times before; he could not well ask again.

With bowed head, and face grey as before, he dragged himself along the almost impassable track; he was exhausted; his limbs seemed heavy as if in chains.

From early morning to about ten o'clock, while the storm raged, the farm hands and servants of Borg gathered in the women's hall upstairs. The men had come from their quarters, and sat about on the beds waiting for the storm to abate before starting out to their work. The cowman alone was forced to brave the elements and tend his cattle.

Ørlygur had opened the door to his own room. He sat with his two-year-old son Ketill on his knees, and talked quietly with his men, exchanging views, or giving them advice about the work of the place. He always treated them as his equals. The men sat with their breakfast-plates on their knees, eating as they talked. Some of the women-folk went to and fro with food or heavy outdoor clothing; others were darning socks or mending shoes.

Ormarr, who was nearing his fourteenth year, sat in his father's room, on the edge of the bed, facing Ørlygur. It was in his mind that things were beginning to be like they

had been before his mother's death, two years ago. He sat with his hands on his knees, swinging his legs by way of accompaniment to his thoughts.

Never before had he missed his mother so sorely as this morning, when every one else seemed to have forgotten her; never before had he felt her loss so keenly. He sighed, checked the swinging of his legs, and sat motionless for a while. Tears rose to his eyes. He felt he must go out, or he would be crying openly in a minute, and disturb the comfort of the rest. For a moment he sat pondering where to go, then he remembered that the cowman would by now have finished work in the shed, and taking down an old violin from a rack, he left the room.

Reaching the cowshed, he sat down in his accustomed place, on a board between two empty chests, and commenced tuning his instrument. It was an old thing that had been in the family for generations, but no one could remember having heard it played. Then, seven years before, Ormarr had been taught the rudiments of music by a wandering fiddler, an adventurous soul, who tramped the country with his fiddle slung over his shoulder in a calf-skin bag. Since then, Ormarr had given all his spare time to the music.

His father had marked with grief how this one interest had gradually swallowed up all else; the boy cared nothing for the management of the estate, or indeed for any other work. Possibly it was this which had led Ørlygur, in spite of the doctor's advice, to wish for another son. And his wife had sacrificed her life in giving him what he wished.

Hard and self-willed as he was in many ways, Ørlygur had yet a profound belief in the right of every human being to determine his own life, to follow his own nature and develop his gifts as long as it involved no actual harm to others. And he made no attempt to coerce the boy; Ormarr had his way.

About ten o'clock, when the snow had ceased, Ormarr

slung his gun across his shoulder and walked off toward Borgarhals to shoot ptarmigan.

On the way, he met Einar à Gili, a troublesome fellow, who, in defiance of the general feeling, had so little respect for the uncrowned king of Borg that he had several times thrashed his son Ormarr without the slightest provocation. It was the more unpardonable, since Einar was about ten years older, and strong as a giant. And now, at sight of him, Ormarr's fingers fumbled in passionate helplessness at the trigger of his gun.

Einar hailed him, to all appearance innocent as could be. "Hey, Ormarr, out shooting? Let's go together?"

Ormarr had no desire to go out shooting with Einar, but was curious to know why the other had suggested it.

"Then we can see who's the best shot."

This was irresistible. Einar was a proverbially bad shot with a gun, and Ormarr knew it. He made no protest, and they went on together.

Every time he fired, Ormarr brought down two or three birds. Einar got at the most one bird at a shot, and often sent the birds fluttering away with broken wings.

Nevertheless, Einar picked up all the birds that fell, and stuffed them into his own bag. Ormarr demanded his share.

"Oh, you've no bag, and there's no sense wasting time tying your birds together at every shot. Wait till we've done."

Ormarr had his suspicions, but said nothing.

After a while they came to a good-sized rock, with two paths round. Ormarr knew that the path to the south was the longer.

"Let's go round and meet on the other side. I'll go this way," he said, taking the northern path. And Einar agreed.

When they met, neither had any more birds to show.

"But you fired, I heard you," said Einar.

"I missed," said Ormarr shortly. Einar laughed, but he took no notice.

"Look, there's one sitting on that rock," said Ormarr suddenly, pointing to a boulder some hundred yards away. "I'll take him."

"No hurry," said Einar; "I'll bag that one myself. We needn't go on any longer—I'm going home now."

"How many have we got?"

"Oh, twenty."

"Good, then give me mine."

"Ah, yes—next time we meet! I'm off. My love to the cattle at home."

Somewhat to his disappointment, Ormarr did not seem to be greatly annoyed, but merely walked off, calling quietly over his shoulder: "Mind you don't miss that bird, Mr. Clever-with-your-gun."

Einar turned round angrily. "Don't shout like that—you'll scare it away. That's my twenty-first."

"All right. It's too frightened of you to move. Go and see."

Einar took careful aim—his hand shook a little, but only because he was inwardly chuckling over the trick he had played Ormarr, and the thought of telling what he had done. Though, indeed, he might get little credit for it all; people were rather apt to side with the lordly folk from Borg. Still, it was good to have fooled that brat Ormarr again.

The bird was sitting close on the rock. Einar fired, and, raising his gun, saw that the bird was still in the same position. Seeing no feathers fly, he thought he must have missed, and loaded again. Then creeping cautiously forward, he rested his gun on a stone, and fired again. The ptarmigan did not move. Einar felt sure his shot must have taken effect. He went right up to it. The bird was dead enough, but what was more, it was cold. And lifting it, he saw a piece of paper tied to one of its legs, with a few words in pencil: "Clever shot, aren't you? Thanks for a pleasant day's sport.—Ormarr."

"Curse the little jackanapes!"

Einar never told any one after all how he had scored off Ormarr that day.

Ormarr hurried along up hill and down, firing and re-loading rapidly, scarcely seeming to take aim at all, but never missing his bird. His narrow sunburnt face was flushed with exertion, and drops of perspiration trickled down from his forehead. His eyes searched eagerly about for game, and in a very short time he had a bag of twenty-seven. Then suddenly, coming round the corner of a rock, he stood face to face with Pall à Seyru. Pall tried to avoid him, but Ormarr called him back. He sat down, wiped the perspiration from his face, and smiled as Pall came up.

"Puh—I'm warm enough, for all it's fifteen degrees of frost. You look half frozen."

Pall muttered something, and tried to hide his empty sack, which had the effect of drawing Ormarr's attention to it.

"What's that—going back home with an empty bag? Won't Bjarni let you have things any more?"

"I'm in debt there already. And I couldn't promise to pay before next autumn."

"But at Christmas-time—and you're not a rich man."

"That makes but little difference in his books."

"Ho—who says that—you?"

" 'Twas Bjarni said so."

"And you had to go and ask him—beg of him—like that?"

"Our cow didn't calve, and we've no milk. And there's no food in the place beyond."

"H'm. What were you going this way round for? 'Tisn't any short way home."

"I didn't want to meet anyone."

"And going back empty-handed? Why didn't you come to us?"

"I've been a burden to many this long time—to your folk more than any. And I'll not ask for help from the parish."

Something in the man's face made Ormarr catch his breath. The blood left his cheeks, and in a hushed voice he asked:

"You mean—you'd . . ."

Pall nodded. "Yes. There's times when it seems better than living on this way."

Ormarr sprang to his feet.

"Pall . . . here, take these birds—just from me. And come home and talk to father. You must. He'll be just as glad to do anything as you could be for it. As for Bjarni, he's a cur. You can tell him so from me next time you see him."

Pall was silenced, and tears rose to his eyes. Ormarr understood, and said no more. They divided the birds into two lots, though Ormarr would gladly have carried the whole, and in silence they started off down the slope.

Ormarr slept in a bed next to his father's. It had been his mother's bed. When the light was put out that night, Ormarr had not yet found courage to tell what he had been thinking of since his meeting with Pall that day. Nor did he know what had passed between his father and Pall.

Half an hour later, perceiving that his father was still awake, he managed to whisper, softly and unsteadily:

"Father!"

It was as if Ørlygur had been waiting for this. He rose, and seated himself at the boy's bedside.

"'Twas well you met Pall this morning, lad. His wife and two little children were waiting for him to come home."

The words gave Ormarr the courage he had lacked.

"Father, may I give him Blesa? His cow won't calve for six weeks, and they've no milk."

"I've promised Pall to send him Skjalda, and a few loads of hay the first fine day the roads are passable. And I am going to take little Gudrun to live here—they've enough to do as it is."

Ormarr's heart was full of thankfulness to his father for his kindness to Pall. But he was shy of speaking; words might say less than he meant. And there must be no misunderstanding between his father and himself—this thought

was always in Ormarr's mind, for he loved his father deeply. Now in the darkness of the room, he could hardly distinguish his features, but in his mind's eye he saw him clearly. sitting there on the bedside. He knew every line in the calm, composed face, finely framed in the dark hair and brown beard. Often he had been told that there was not a handsomer man to be found than his father. He had the physique of an athlete, and Ormarr knew his every movement and attitude. He strove now to breathe all his love towards the loved figure, vaguely seen in reality, yet clear as ever to his mind. He felt that his father could not fail to perceive the mute expression of his loving gratitude.

For a while both were silent. Then Ørlygur rose, and smoothing his son's hair, he said:

"You know, Ormarr, that all I possess will in time belong to you and your brother. Then you will be able to give away more than trifles. At present, you have little to use in charity, but what you have, you may do with as you please. Remember that it is our duty to help those who are poorer wherever we can. And when you hear of any one that needs a helping hand, always come to me. Wealth is not lost by charity. And now good-night—it is time we were asleep."

He went back to his bed, and a moment after, spoke again.

"Ormarr, you remember how generous your mother always was. You seem to grow more like her every day. I think she would have been very happy tonight."

Ormarr burst into tears, hiding his face in the pillow to make no sound. And after a little while, he fell asleep.

When he awoke next morning, he felt for the first time since his mother's death as if she were invisibly present among them—as a link between his father and himself.

And he was filled with a proud sense of having entered into a secret covenant with his father; it gave him a feeling of manhood, of responsibility.

CHAPTER II

BJARNI JONSSON, the trader, and Daniel Sveisson, The parish priest,—Sera Daniel, as he was called, —sat drinking in Bjarni Jonsson's front parlour. They were seated by the window, looking out over the fjord.

The sun was setting, and the shadow of the house was flung far out over the smooth sea. The smoke from the chimney had already reached the rocky haunt of the eider duck. The cliff was the home of immense flocks of many-coloured birds, for it was spring, and the breeding season was at its height. Numbers of gorgeous drakes were swimming round the rock, and amongst them a few plump and comely eider duck, taking an hour's rest from their duties before sunset, leaving the nest and eggs to the care of the father birds.

Sera Daniel enjoyed the view, for he was looking out over his property. The eider-duck cliffs, even those farther out, were by ancient custom regarded as belonging to the living. And they brought him in a very nice little sum.

He puffed away at his long pipe in silence.

Bjarni noticed his contented air, and was not pleased. Surely it would be more reasonable that the revenue from the eider-duck cliffs should come to him, Bjarni, as owner of the shore lands. But priests were all alike, a greedy lot! For ages past they had been petted and spoiled with all sorts of unjust privileges and unreasonable perquisites. And what did they do for it all? Nothing in the least degree useful, nor ever had—unless it were something useful to grow fat themselves in a comfortable cure.

Such was Bjarni's train of thought. And he meant it all quite earnestly. But he said nothing, for, outwardly, he and Sera Daniel were the best of friends—drank their grog together, and played cards in all good fellowship. At

the moment, they were only waiting for the doctor to come and take a hand.

No, in his inmost heart Bjarni detested the priest; the portly figure of the man was a continual eyesore to him. Sera Daniel was a man of imposing presence, there was dignity and calm authority in his carriage and bearing, and Bjarni, having no such attributes himself, found herein further cause for jealousy.

It would be hard to find a less imposing specimen of the human male than Bjarni Jonsson, trader, of Hofsfjordur. Outwardly, he resembled more an ill-nourished errand boy than anything else. His face was grey and angular, the top of his head was covered with a growth of colourless hair, and his pale blue eyes were as a rule void of expression, for the reason that he was in constant fear of betraying his ever-present jealousy of every one and everything round him. And the struggle had marked his face, his eyes, every movement of his puny, stunted body, with a stamp of servile cunning. His clothes hung about him like the rags of a scarecrow in the field, the dragged moustache that hid most of his mouth added to the general impression of meanness and insincerity.

At a first glance, Sera Daniel presented a complete contrast.

His burly, well-fed body seemed to exhale an atmosphere of cordiality—an ecclesiastical cheerfulness which gave his whole bearing something of the stamp of the prelate. His fair hair carefully brushed back from the broad, arched forehead, the blue, beaming eyes, the frank expression of his clean-shaven face, which, however, never for a moment relapsed from the bright, superior, yet mild professional mask of dignity, of healthy godliness attained through inward strife and by the grace of Heaven; the placid, yet telling gestures of his somewhat large, plump hands; the sonorous voice with its echo of sanctity; and last, not least, his faultless black attire—in short, his whole outward appearance seemed to combine human forbearance and lofty understanding with the rare power of living a full and

yet exemplary life, kindly chastening himself as well as others—all the qualities that go to the making of a true servant of the Lord.

But the simple, canny folk among whom he lived, and from whom he himself was sprung, had not been long in penetrating beneath these externals. They realized that he played his part well, and with a suitable mask, which they tolerated, even respecting him for the same—at any rate, in his presence, or when young people were about. But the elders among themselves were not afraid of unmasking Sera Daniel with a sly wink, as it were, in a manner of which he would certainly not have approved, nor found consistent with the respect due to their spiritual guide.

Men played their parts well in the parish of Hofsfjordur.

And in the opinion of his parishioners, Sera Daniel was not the only one who played a part at variance with the character behind the mask, though Sera Daniel himself might have believed so.

There was one family, or more exactly, a single figure, that did not fit in with the cast of the local comedy. A keen observer could not have failed to notice that the life of the community centred round this one man: a dominant figure among the rest, who knew how to shape their views according to his will. And he was a source of much annoyance to the actors proper, more especially those who had cast themselves for leading rôles. That man was Ørlygur à Borg.

Ørlygur was in his forty-second year. From early youth he had been the natural leader among his fellows; first and foremost, of course, as only son and heir to Borg, but also by virtue of his personality, which was excellently suited to bear the rank and wealth and responsibility inherited from his forebears, who had, as far back as the memory of man, been the self-appointed and generally respected leaders of the community.

Ørlygur à Borg, apart from being the greatest land-owner in the district, was also chairman of the local council, and led the singing in church—in short, all that an Icelandic

combining wealth with intellect and personality could attain.

Moreover—and this was perhaps the corner-stone in the edifice of his absolute authority—he was a conscientious adviser, an untiring and disinterested helper of the poor, and an experienced and successful, albeit unlicensed, veterinary surgeon. In this last capacity he was consulted not only by the district, but also by many from other counties, who were glad of his unfeigned advice and skilful aid.

It was generally recognized that Ørlygur à Borg was ever ready to serve and assist any one, however humble, provided they accepted him as a ruler. He never tolerated any attempt to place others on a footing of equality with himself, or any violation of his privileges, however slight. To those who submitted to his sway, he was a mild and gracious god; to those who forgot the deference he demanded, he was a merciless tyrant, swooping down on them in defiance of all generally accepted notions of justice—though he would forget and forgive readily enough when it was over.

The peasants did not mind this. To them, Ørlygur à Borg was a kind of human Providence—no less inevitable, and probably more pleasant, than the divine. They knew, of course, that there was a King who ruled over all, including the King of Borg. But they were nevertheless inclined to place both on the same level. In the event of conflict arising, doubtless Ørlygur à Borg would be a match for the other—even to gaining for himself the armalet of sovereign power, as Halldor Snorrason had done in the fight with Harold Hardrada. Ørlygur was equal to that at least.

Their faith in him amounted almost to a religion. They felt themselves, under his protection, secure and well provided for.

Some few there were, however, who did not approve of the unlimited power generally conceded to Ørlygur à Borg, and disliked what they considered his unjustifiable assumption of superiority. This spring, there were at least three such discontented souls within the parish. Two of them we have met already—Sera Daniel and the trader, drinking

their grog in the parlour looking over the sea. And the third of the rebels was the doctor, whom they were expecting to join them in a hand at cards.

The priest and the trader, when alone together, spoke but little. They had no interests in common. Their intellectual sphere was very limited, and both had the same characteristic of the narrow-minded: concentrating every atom of thought and will each on his own well-being. Consequently, all talk between the two was obviously insincere; so much so, that even these two not very sensitive beings realized the fact, and instinctively shrank from any intimacy of conversation.

On this occasion, as ill-luck would have it, the doctor kept them waiting longer than usual, and Bjarni, as host, could not well sit all the time without a word. At last, by way of saying something, he asked how the wool was getting on.

"Dry and packed three days ago," answered Sera Daniel.

Bjarni's eyes flashed, and a smile flickered for a moment over his wooden face.

Sera Daniel read that smile, and marked the scorn of it. But as the scorn, he knew, applied no less to the smiler than to himself he refrained, on principle, from taking offence.

Bjarni looked him straight in the face, and their eyes met. Then suddenly both realized that this innocent and haphazard attempt at casual conversation had opened up common ground between them, an unexpected community of interest where each had only thought to find the altogether unwished-for company of the other.

Bjarni did not quite know how to improve the opportunity at first. He decided on a gambit of innocent raillery.

"Yes, we're ready to weigh it now, I suppose . . . that is, of course . . ."

Sera Daniel looked searchingly at him, unwilling as yet to take any definite step himself.

"What are you paying this season?"

"Sixty-five for best white, forty-two for black and mixed."

Sera Daniel glanced at him with a curious smile. "Is that—ah—the ordinary price, or what you are paying Ørlygur à Borg?"

The trader's face flushed violently; the hand holding the glass trembled a little. Without waiting for an answer, Sera Daniel made another shot.

"Or perhaps you are thinking of paying the same price to all—for once?"

Bjarni eyed him awhile in silence. He seemed to be turning over something in his mind. The priest felt the glance, and knew what lay behind it, but evinced no discomfiture. On the contrary, he met the trader's eyes with a smile of irritating calm.

At last Bjarni spoke.

"Yes," he said slowly, "if you can let me have your wool tomorrow morning."

That same night Ormarr sat on the slope of the hill looking down to Hofsa—just above the spot where the wool from Borg was washed every spring. He was keeping watch over the clip. Large quantities were already dry and stowed in bags; the grassy slopes were dotted with little white piles of that which had still to be spread, waiting till the morning sun had drawn the dew.

Silently, filled with emotion, Ormarr gazed at the beauty and peace of the spring night. The sky was clear and blue, and bright as day.

Below him flowed the crystal rivulets, and farther off, above green mountain slopes veiled in the glistening web of dew, rose stark grey cliffs, furrowed by glimmering waters, higher up again, the luminous white of the snow peaks, tinted all the night through with the gold of dancing sun rays.

From his childhood Ormarr had claimed the privilege of keeping guard during the spring nights. In the earlier part of the season, he took his post on the freshly growing pasture

lands, keeping the sheep and horses from straying in to nibble off the first blades of the young grass. Later, when the sheep were shorn and driven up to the mountains, he mounted guard over the wool, keeping a keen look-out for prowling vagabonds, and covering up the heaps with tarpaulin in case of sudden rain.

To him, the vigils of these quiet nights were as hours of devotion. During the lonely watches, he bared his soul in worship of the majesty of nature, free of the restraint he always felt in the presence of others. He drank in the fresh night air, with its sweetness of spring, like a precious draught. And at times, the depth of his feeling brought great tears to his eyes. Alone, he could allow himself to some extent thus to give way to emotion, yet even then not without a certain sense of shame.

Tonight he was sadder than ever. It would be fine tomorrow, the last of the wool would dry during the day, in time to be fetched away before evening.

That meant it was his last night's watch this spring.

His eyes took leave of the wild duck swimming in the stream near their nests, that he had cared for and protected; several times he had waded out to see how they fared. He looked the hillside up and down, bidding good-bye to the buttercups and dandelions—every morning he had watched their opening, a solitary witness, as they unfolded at the gracious bidding of the sun. He noted, too, the great clusters of tiny-flowered forget-me-nots that grew everywhere around.

At five o'clock he rose to go. From one of the chimneys smoke was already rising, thin and clear as from a censer; old Ossa had hung the big kettle over the fire for early coffee. A big plate of new bread would be waiting for him, with butter, meat, cheese, and a steaming cup of coffee—a delicious meal.

From force of habit he glanced round before moving off; counted the chimneys from which smoke was rising, and looked about for any other signs of life. Then suddenly he realized that something unusual was going on. With trem-

bling hands he adjusted the telescope he always carried, and looked towards the spot.

A moment later he lowered the glass and stared in bewilderment towards the fjord. In a flash he realized what was happening, and set off home at full speed.

Heedless of Ossa and the meal she had already waiting for him, he dashed up to his father's room, not even stopping, as was his wont, to caress the fair curly head of tiny Gudrun, the three-year-old daughter of Pall à Seyru, whom Ørlygur had adopted. Ormarr loved the child.

He did not stop till he reached his father's bed. When Ørlygur opened his eyes, he saw Ormarr standing before him, very pale, and breathless with his speed. The sight startled even the King of Borg out of his habitual calm; he sat up with a start. Realizing instinctively that something was wrong, he reached out for his clothes at once.

"What is it, my son?"

"Father . . . Sera Daniel . . . carting his wool in already to the station. . . ."

Ørlygur was already getting into his clothes. He stopped motionless for a second; then a faint smile passed over his face, and he seemed to be thinking. In less than a minute he had made up his mind.

"The horses!"

Ormarr did not wait for any further order. He hurried out of the room, snatched up a bridle, and ran out calling: "Gryla, Køput, Kondut!"

Barking and delighted, the farm dogs clustered round him, and followed him out into the paddock, where he caught his father's horse and vaulted into the saddle.

Ten minutes later, forty horses were stamping and neighing ready for work. Swiftly they were brought round, the pack-saddle put on, and loaded up with the finished wool.

Ormarr had overheard his father's brief, sharp orders to the foreman, a man he could trust. He had kept close at hand all the time, listening eagerly to what was said. At last, when all was ready for the start, he looked up earnestly.

“Father—may I?”

Ørlygur à Borg looked at his son in surprise.

“You? Nay, lad, I’m afraid that would hardly do.”

But his voice was not so decided, harsh almost, as it was wont to be when he refused a request. He even glanced inquiringly, as it were, at the foreman, who smiled back merrily in return. That seemed to settle it. Ormarr’s eyes were bright with anticipation.

Ørlygur laid one hand on his son’s shoulder—not patting his head or cheek as he generally did—and said:

“Good. You can do the talking. You heard what is to be said and done—you are sure you understand?”

Ormarr did not give himself time to answer. But his leap into the saddle was enough; evidently he had grasped the spirit of his father’s commands.

They did not take the usual route to the trading station; anything moving along that road would be visible from below for the greater part of the way. And they were to come unexpectedly. Therefore they took the road across Borgarhals and Nordurdal, so as to reach the station before any knew of their coming.

It was the unwritten law of the district that no wool should be brought to the station before the King of Borg had sent in his. The custom dated back further than any could remember, it was part of the traditional precedence generally conceded to the masters of Borg. At first, it had sprung from a natural desire among the people to show their respect for their chieftain and benefactor. Then, when it had grown to be a time-honoured custom, the men of Borg had taken care to have it maintained, regarding any violation as a personal affront, a challenge—and none had ever known such challenge to remain unpunished.

There was, moreover, another custom in connection with the sales of wool—to wit, that Ørlygur à Borg fixed his own price for his, while the others who had wool to sell had to be satisfied with what the trader chose to pay them. Ørlygur took no heed of ruling market prices, but based his figures

on the prices he had to pay during the past year for goods he himself had bought from the trader.

No one grumbled at the arrangement. Ørlygur always paid cash for what he ordered, while every one else found it necessary to take goods on credit; all had an account, great or small, with Bjarni, and were in consequence dependent on his good-will. They knew, that in the event of Bjarni's good-will failing, there was always Ørlygur, ever ready to help whoever asked.

Truth to tell, Bjarni, the trader, was not a little nervous when Sera Daniel arrived with his wool early in the morning. He did his best, however, to conceal his uneasiness, but the false jocularly with which he strove to hide it was belied by the anxious glances wherewith he scanned every now and then the road from Borg.

The weighing in was done in the big warehouse. Sera Daniel was smiling and confident as usual, though his eyes showed signs of having slept ill the night before.

"Well, Sera Daniel," said Bjarni, who was watching the weighing with mock earnestness, "this is a bold stroke of yours indeed." He glanced hurriedly in the direction of Borg as he spoke. "Frankly I was not at all sure that you would have ventured, when it came to the point. Anyhow, I fancy this marks the end of 'the King's' supremacy."

The doctor came up, yawning, and rubbing his eyes.

"Aha—this looks nice," he observed. And then, referring to Bjarni's last remark, he went on: "And it's high time we did start acting for ourselves. Rebellion, eh? I tell you what, I'll stand drinks all round when you've finished here."

There was great commotion at the station; folk hung about in crowds outside the stockroom. A few only dared to enter; the rest preferred to wait and see what happened. They were not without a certain satisfaction at the act of rebellion, albeit aware that it was their duty to feel indignant. There was a general atmosphere of excitement—what would happen next?

"And this year the price of wool is the same to all," said

Bjarni exultantly to the doctor. "If he doesn't care to deal with me, he can go to Jon Borgari."

The doctor laughed loudly, and Sera Daniel smiled approval. Jon Borgari was a man of sixty, who had set up on his own account in a small way, some five years back. On payment of fifty Kroner, he had acquired a licence to trade. His store was a mean little place, his whole stock-in-trade hardly amounted to more than one of Ørlygur's ordinary purchases from Bjarni. He had found it impossible to do any considerable business, as the peasants were all in debt to Bjarni already, and could not transfer their custom elsewhere. Jon was considerably older than Bjarni, but the latter's business was of longer standing. Bjarni had moved to Hofsfjordur twelve years before, and partly, at least, by his industry and smartness, he had compelled an old-established house in the place, a branch of a foreign firm, to close down. This he could never have done had it not been for the patronage of Ørlygur à Borg.

It was commonly supposed that Jon Borgari had saved a good sum in his time—and the idea was further supported by his recent marriage to a maiden of eighteen, who had accepted him in preference to many eager suitors of the younger generation. But no one ever dreamed of considering Jon Borgari as a possible "purveyor to the King."

Bjarni's warehousemen were busy weighing in the priest's consignment. There was still no sign of life on the road from Borg. And gradually even Bjarni himself began to forget his fears.

Then suddenly the blow fell. Ormarr with his five men, and the laden horses, came galloping up: Ørlygur à Borg had sent his wool.

Bjarni was struck with amazement; for a moment he could not grasp the situation. Sera Daniel retired prudently to the back of the room. The doctor joined him, with an expression of pleasant anticipation on his puffy face. This was going to be amusing. And, fortunately, he himself had nothing to do with the affair.

When the first shock had passed off, Bjarni realized with

a feeling of relief that Ørlygur himself had stayed at home. To the onlooker this was a wonder in itself. Never before had Ørlygur à Borg sent in his wool without accompanying it in person.

For a moment all sorts of wild conjectures passed through Bjarni's brain. And then—he committed the fatal error of coming to the conclusion which best suited himself; Ørlygur must have stayed away in order to avoid being present at his own defeat, in the setting aside of ancient custom.

Ormarr did not dismount. He rode straight up to the trader, and said:

“My father has given orders that his wool is to be weighed in at once.”

He spoke without the slightest trace of emotion; as if it were a matter of course that the trader should stop the weighing of any one else's wool and attend to Ørlygur's forthwith.

Bjarni again indulged in an erroneous inference: Ørlygur à Borg had stayed away because he feared his demands might be refused. And if “the King” himself thought that possible—why, then, it could be done!

A wave of joy swept over Bjarni. He felt as if he had already won a decisive battle against heavy odds. And his reply was given in a tone more overbearing than usual—though he regretted it the moment he had spoken.

“We can't very well stop weighing in this lot now. What do you say, Sera Daniel?”

Sera Daniel said nothing at all. His friend Bjarni would have to carry the matter through without assistance.

Bjarni turned to Ormarr once more—the boy was still in the saddle—and adopting a fatherly tone, went on:

“But it won't take very long, you know. If you start unloading the horses now, and get the bales undone, while we're finishing this, there won't be much time lost.”

But before any one could say more, a new development occurred. Ørlygur à Borg, on his snorting, fiery mount, Sleipnir, dashed into the stockroom.

His entry came like a thunder-clap. The onlookers, who had kept their distance up to now, drew closer in, holding their breath. No one, not even Ørlygur's own men, with the exception of Ormarr, had expected this.

Bjarni, Sera Daniel, and the doctor greeted him in servile fashion; he answered with an impatient gesture, as of a sovereign in ungracious mood towards importunate underlings. Then riding up to Ormarr, he asked quietly:

"What are you waiting for?"

"They are weighing in Sera Daniel's wool."

"Has Bjarni refused to take over mine at once?"

"Yes. He asked us to unload and wait."

"Good. We will take it back to Borg."

Then, having given his orders, Ørlygur rode up to Bjarni, pressing him so close that the foam from his horse bespattered the trader, forcing him to retreat step by step.

"Now mark you this, Bjarni Jonsson. You can hire horses yourself to fetch that wool from Borg. But do not come until you are prepared to pay a heavy price. I warn you, my wool this year will not be cheap."

Then, without a word of farewell, he turned his back on the speechless and astonished trio, and with a cheery smile to the crowd, rode homeward, followed by his men.

That day messengers were sent out from Borg to all the farmers round, to say that Ørlygur à Borg was willing to buy wool for cash, at the same prices as offered by the trader.

Next morning, he sent off one of his men with a letter and a saddle-horse to Jon Borgari. Jon read the letter, mounted at once, and rode back to Borg, where he was closeted with Ørlygur for some time. When he left the place, he looked as if ten years had fallen from his shoulders.

The farmers understood that Ørlygur's offer to buy their wool for cash was equivalent to a command—they must choose between him and the trader. And they did not hesitate a moment.

Ørlygur paid them in gold and silver. Then, with his help, they wrote out the lists of the goods they required, the lists being subsequently handed to Jon Borgari. Jon was

now Ørlygur's ally, and in a very short time his unpretending little store was threatening the trade of Bjarni Jonsson's own.

Bjarni Jonsson's trick had recoiled upon himself. He got Sera Daniel's wool—but not a pound from any one beside.

CHAPTER III

ONE burning hot afternoon, late in the summer, Ormarr was sitting up on the edge of a high ridge of Borgarfjall, to the west of Borg. A great flock of sheep grazed on the plateau below.

Ormarr, as shepherd, found his task light. It was just after lambing-time, and for the first two or three days the sheep had been difficult to handle. Full of anxiety, and bleating piteously, they rushed about in all directions, vainly seeking their offspring. Now, however, they had more or less accustomed themselves to the new state of things, and kept fairly well together, so that Ormarr was free to devote most of his time to his favourite pursuits: playing the violin, and dreaming.

He made a curious picture, this fourteen-year-old peasant lad, as he sat there, clad in rough homespun, his clothes fitting clumsily, and hiding the lithe beauty of his frame. The clear-cut face, the strong chin resting on the violin, and the lean hand with its supple fingers running over the strings, contrasted strangely with the everyday coat, darned and patched in many places.

Often he fell into a reverie, his dark eyes gazing on the distant mountains, the fingers relaxing, and the slender brown hand with the bow resting on his knee. The face, too thin for a boy of his age, bore a grave and thoughtful expression, with a touch of melancholy. The black masses of curling, unruly hair, and the faint coppery tinge in the skin, suggested Celtic descent.

Yet despite the trace of something foreign in his appearance, he was at heart a true child of his country. The wistful, dreamy thoughts that burned in his dark, passionate eyes, betrayed that rich and abundant imagination peculiar to the sons of Iceland, fostered by the great solitude and

desolate yet fertile grandeur of the land itself. So deeply is the sense of that grandeur rooted in their hearts, that even those who have roamed the world over, and lived most of their lives in milder and richer climes, will yet declare that Iceland is the most beautiful of all.

Another typical trait in Ormarr's nature was the melancholy that consumed his soul—a product of youthful self-absorption without the corresponding experience.

His descent from the ancient and noble race of Borg was apparent in his chariness of words, in his credulity,—it was a thing inconceivable, that he or any of his should tell a falsehood,—in his self-reliance, and strong belief that he was in the right, as long as he followed the dictates of his own conscience. Young as he was, every look, every feature, betrayed the born chieftain in him.

This was evident most of all in his music—which consisted mainly of dreams and fantasies he had himself composed. From the first day he had learned to hold the instrument, he had thrown into his music a burning interest and an overwhelming love. It gave him the only possible outlet for the longing that filled him.

Loneliness and despair sobbed in the sweet and passionate strains; the strings vibrated with a deep desire, that yet had no conscious aim, but the sound brought relief, though never satisfying to the full.

His playing revealed his soul as a wanderer in the wilderness—as a giant whose strength is doomed to slumber under the weight of unbreakable shackles; it showed that, to him, life was a slow, consuming pain, the purpose of which he could not grasp; that he was born with a wealth of power, yet found no single thing to which he could devote it. Here he was, heir to the estate, and yet—perhaps for that very reason—born in bondage.

Despite his youth, Ormarr was alive to the danger of his changing moods, which, as he often thought, bordered on insanity. Proud as he was of being heir to Borg, he nevertheless felt a smouldering hatred of his heritage, since it fettered him from birth. With all these longings in his soul, he

was conscious of being himself part and parcel of Borg; something told him that here, and here alone, was the soil in which his personality and varying moods could grow into one harmonious and united whole. He had only to follow in the steps of his fathers. But this, again, seemed too easy a solution of the riddle of life—he preferred a struggle to the death. It was as if his descent, and his natural prospects, excluded him from all the adventures he longed for; the part for which he seemed cast was beneath the level of his strength and ability.

But he realized that any outward expression of such thoughts would compromise him, and bring disgrace upon his family: he must conceal them, hide them in silence, never breathe a word of it all to any other. Only in his music, where he could speak without betraying himself by words, could he venture to ease his heart of its burden.

He felt like a galley slave, chained to the oar for life, without hope of escape. The idea of rebellion, of emancipation, had never crossed his mind. Had any one suggested such a thing, he would have risen up in arms against it at once, for, in spite of all, he felt himself so at one with his race that to desert it thus would be nothing less than to betray himself.

.

That same afternoon an unexpected event took place at Borg. The Vicar, Sera Daniel, accompanied by Bjarni Jonsson, came to call.

Ørlygur à Borg was resting on his bed, which in the daytime was covered, like a couch, with a many-coloured rug, when news was brought him of the visit. The girl informed him that she had asked the visitors into the big hall. Ørlygur smiled when he heard their names. He had just returned from a sale of driftwood, held at the instance of one of the farmers whose lands ran down to the shore, and who yearly gathered in large stocks of washed-up timber, which was subsequently sold, either privately or by auction. He was tired, and felt too comfortable where he was to care about moving.

"Let them come in here if they have anything to say," he told the girl.

The two men exchanged glances when the message was brought them. Each found a certain satisfaction in witnessing the humiliation of the other, which helped him to bear his own. Nevertheless, on entering Ørlygur's room, both were visibly embarrassed.

Ørlygur himself did nothing to set them at their ease. Without rising, he took their proffered hands, answered their greetings with a murmur of something inaudible, and indicated that they might be seated.

There was but a single chair in the room, placed between the two beds. Sera Daniel would willingly have left it to Bjarni—though he considered it due to himself and his superior social position to take it in order not to be too close to his host. Bjarni, however, had a similar disinclination, and forestalled his companion by taking a seat at once on the edge of the bed, well pleased at having attained his end, while seeming to act from sheer natural modesty.

For a while no one spoke. Ørlygur stretched himself, and smiled faintly, awaiting the explanation of the visit.

Sera Daniel cleared his throat for an introduction he had prepared beforehand. But he got no further than a slight cough. And, looking at Bjarni, he perceived that the latter was in a like predicament, his usually grey face turning a fiery red.

Ørlygur was enjoying the situation, and maintained a ruthless silence.

Sera Daniel soon realized that he could look for no assistance from the trader, who apparently considered that the priest's closer proximity to the enemy carried with it the obligation to deliver the first attack. At last he stammered out:

"Er—we have come—to tell the truth—to see you. H'm—about a matter that—er—distresses us somewhat. And we thought that—perhaps—it might be not altogether pleasant to yourself—that is to say—of course—I mean, considering . . ."

Þrlygur slowly rose to a sitting position. Then setting his hands firmly on his knees and leaning forward slightly, he looked straight into the other's eyes.

"To tell the truth, Sera Daniel, I am not aware of any matter which distresses me in any way at the moment. I fancy your idea of something *mutually* unpleasant must be due to a misunderstanding. Your troubles are hardly mine, you know; the more so since we have seen very little of each other for quite a long time now."

"No, no, of course not. But—you know better than any one else that it is you who set the example to all the parish."

"If that is so, you explain yourself badly. I stay away from church, certainly—for the simple reason that I prefer to avoid meeting a clergyman whom I dislike. My affair with you will keep me away from church until it is settled—possibly as long as you conduct the service there. If the rest of your parishioners elect to do the same, it merely means that your conscience will soon forbid you to remain as spiritual guide to a flock who avoid you. If, on the other hand, your conscience should prove more accommodating in this respect, I have no doubt that the authorities will discover in a short time what you are unable to see for yourself. You take my meaning, Sera Daniel?"

"I am not sure that I do. I cannot see why a thoughtless action on my part last spring—which I deeply regret—should embitter you to such an extent that you stake the spiritual welfare of the congregation in revenge."

"Oh, that's rather too much. You say you regret your thoughtlessness last spring. I translate that as meaning simply that you regret having managed so badly; that you realize the failure of your clumsy conspiracy against me, with our friend the trader there—who seems worn out by the heavy business of the summer season, since he apparently can't open his mouth. And then you haven't even the decency to keep this sordid affair to itself, but must mix it up with the spiritual welfare of your congregation. Well, it simply shows that you are more impudent even than I had thought."

"If it were not that my position as incumbent here forces me to set aside my personal interests—for the sake of the parish, you understand—and to avert if possible the disastrous consequences—"

"Disastrous? My dear Sera Daniel, you are a marvel. Unless you take 'the parish' as meaning yourself and some few others, I cannot see your argument at all. I do not regret, and see no reason to regret, what has taken place, and I am afraid 'the parish' takes the same view. I am not one of those men who act hastily and afterwards regret their folly. Candidly, Sera Daniel, your ideas are too vague and too complicated for me to care to discuss them further. I have had quite enough of empty talk; let us come to facts. And here I imagine that Bjarni Jonsson will be better able to speak. How very fortunate that he happened to come at the same time."

Then, turning to Bjarni, Ørlygur went on:

"As far as I remember, we arranged last time I saw you, that you could come out here and buy my wool when you were prepared to pay a decent price."

"Certainly—yes, of course. That is, I am ready . . . to discuss . . ."

"Very well, then. I hope the discussion will be brief. Let me make it clear at the start that my terms are fixed, and not intended as a basis for negotiation. You can, of course, refuse them if you prefer, but I must insist on the matter being settled quickly. I need not tell you, I suppose, that I bought up all the wool I could last spring, when I realized that prices would be exceptionally high—your books have no doubt made that evident to yourself already. I am willing to let you have all my wool at a reasonable price, as I know that many of the peasants hereabout are in your debt, and that you are anxious for a settlement. I myself am not in your debt. I do not owe you money, and certainly very little consideration. My peasants, on the other hand—you must excuse my calling them 'my peasants,' we are linked, you know, by friendship and common interests—my peasants owe you money, and I am willing to offer my wool in clearance of their debts, or as

much of their debts as it will cover. The debt will thus be transferred to a creditor who can perhaps afford to give them longer credit. You, I take it, are chiefly anxious to make money.”

Bjarni sat with downcast eyes. The word of “the King” cut him like a knife. He realized well enough that his business at Hofsfjordur would be entirely ruined. Up till now he had cherished a faint hope that Ørlygur would spare him, if only he humbled himself sufficiently. At length he realized, that though Ørlygur had mercifully saved him from absolute ruin, and reduced his loss by paying the farmers’ debts, he would never have another customer unless he could succeed in winning him over again. And the present reception did not seem to offer any great hope of re-establishing that connection.

Yet he still clung to the hope that by absolute humility he might work on Ørlygur to extend his leniency still further. Therefore, without a murmur, he agreed to Ørlygur’s terms. He could not reconcile himself to the idea of leaving the place and throwing up the excellent position he had toiled and planned so many years to gain. He could not bear to think that all was absolutely lost through his own stupidity.

His blood boiled at the thought, but he dared not show it; his fate depended now on Ørlygur’s next move. And meanwhile, his little cunning soul was on the alert for any opportunity of showing “the King” what a loyal subject he could be, and would, if only he might be forgiven this once.

Nevertheless, his heart was filled with a vindictive hatred—first and foremost hatred of Ørlygur, then of Sera Daniel and the rest of the community. Fate had been cruel to him, and was mocking him into the bargain—the one consolation about the whole affair was that things seemed as bad at least, if not worse, for Sera Daniel.

Had Bjarni, the trader, but known that Ørlygur à Borg was at that very moment filled with loathing for the servility he displayed, he would have given vent to a burst of rage on the spot—and it might have saved him, as nothing else could.

Ørlygur certainly felt sorry for the fellow; he knew how much Bjarni had at stake, and how harmless and altogether inferior he really was. He decided, therefore, to spare him, if he could, by unreasonable demands, lead him to give up his servile attitude and lose his temper in honest fashion.

"Well, then, my horses and men are at your disposal for carrying the wool, if you wish to buy it—the price of transport, of course, being in addition. I can let you have fifty horses for the work, so it will not take long. The price—well, it will simplify matters to fix one price for all wool of the same colour. That is to say: one Krone for all white, and half a Krone for the rest."

Bjarni turned pale; for the moment he found it difficult to control his features. He looked at Ørlygur with the eyes of a wounded dog. But Ørlygur seemed not to notice his imploring gaze, and went on carelessly:

"Well, what do you say? Is that fair?"

"Yes," stammered Bjarni in reply. Then, quickly, and with an assumption of easiness, he added:

"Well, then, that is settled. Tomorrow?" He nodded as he said the last word; he felt that the moment had come to change the tone of the conversation. This cheerful acceptance on his part of an absurd price was a friendly hand, which he expected Ørlygur would grasp at once.

The effect, however, was contrary to what he had looked for. Ørlygur seemed to take it as a personal affront; he rose quickly, and said in an angry voice:

"Very well, then!"

The two visitors also rose, and without a word all three walked from the room.

Sera Daniel also was highly dissatisfied with the result of his visit. Both he and Bjarni were in a state of painful suspense with regard to the future; they could not persuade themselves that this was Ørlygur's last word in the matter. It was too dismal a failure for them to accept it as final. Sera Daniel had hoped that the threatening cloud of Ørlygur's displeasure, which had darkened his work and prospects all through the summer, would be dispelled. He fretted inwardly

over every word he had said, and the manner in which he had spoken. Bjarni, too, had cherished similar hopes; an amicable settlement meant even more to him than to the priest.

As if by common instinct, both men hesitated to leave; their manner showed plainly that there was more in their minds. But Ørlygur pretended not to understand their anxiety, and left it to them to make any further move.

Meantime, they had reached the stables. And here they stopped. Ørlygur seemed only waiting for them to take their leave; but the visitors still hoped for some opening—something to happen, they did not quite know what.

Then suddenly the quivering notes of a violin were heard. Here was a welcome excuse for delaying their departure. Ørlygur was listening with delight, as so often before, to his son's playing; for a while all three stood motionless.

Ørlygur smiled; a smile that covered, perhaps, both his admiration and his aversion—the two conflicting feelings which Ormarr's playing always seemed to awaken at the same time.

Then Sera Daniel spoke—simply and naturally:

“How beautiful!” But at the same moment he reflected that he ought to know Ørlygur's character better than to say things like that. And by way of altering the impression of his words, he added, in an entirely different tone:

“There is the making of a fortune in that music.”

Ørlygur à Borg did not grasp his meaning. And though he knew that Sera Daniel would never dare to make fun of him, “the King,” to his face, he was on his guard. He looked at the speaker with a glance of cold inquiry.

Sera Daniel went on:

“In foreign countries there are artists who make fortunes by playing the violin. I have often wished that I were an artist like that . . . it must be wonderful to travel from one great city to another and be rich. I have heard such men in Copenhagen, when I was studying there.”

When Ørlygur à Borg realized that the priest's words pointed, not to impossible realms of fancy, but to a world of beautiful reality, the look in his eyes changed. So strange

was his glance, so complete the alteration, that Sera Daniel flushed with pleasure at the effect of his words.

For a while Ørlygur stared straight before him, as if in thought. Great things were passing in his mind. Where others would deliberate at length, Ørlygur à Borg was capable of taking in a situation in a moment. He was thinking of Ormarr's and his brother's future, and with his wonted respect for sudden impulses, which he was almost inclined to attribute to divine influence, he made up his mind quickly.

He turned to the priest.

"While I think of it, Sera Daniel, there is a matter I have been wanting to talk over with you for some time. Are you going back home by the shorter road? Then I will go with you part of the way."

The trader took the words as a hint to himself to disappear. Bidding good-bye to Ørlygur and the priest, he rode off with a troubled mind. This was worse than all; an understanding between Ørlygur and Sera Daniel left him utterly hopeless.

Sera Daniel, on the other hand, was delighted at the honour conferred on him by the King of Borg. Leading his horse, he walked down the road with Ørlygur, waiting for what was to come.

Ørlygur had made no mistake in calculating that the fright he had given the priest would suffice to keep him from any further attempts at revolt. After that lesson in the unwritten law of the parish, Sera Daniel would be ready to serve him to the utmost, if need should arise. And as things were turning out now, the priest might well be useful to him, in regard to the future of his sons. Ørlygur determined to make peace.

They walked on for a while in silence. Then Ørlygur spoke:

"Sera Daniel—would you undertake to teach Ormarr Danish? He knows a little, and it would be as well for him to improve on it before he goes away. He will be leaving for Copenhagen this autumn."

Sera Daniel was almost moved.

"A pleasure indeed—a very great pleasure. I am glad to

hear he is going. There is a great future in store for him—of that I feel sure. I have rarely heard any one play so well; he seems far in advance of his age. You should send him to the Conservatoire at Copenhagen—they will make a great artist of him there.”

“Yes—or to some eminent teacher.”

“At first—yes, of course.”

“From first to last,” Ørlygur corrected, with a smile. “He must have the very best teacher throughout. I am going to give him every possible chance. And with regard to his stay in Copenhagen, and matters generally, perhaps you could give him some hints. . . .”

They discussed the matter at length. And when Sera Daniel rode home, his fickle heart swelled with love and admiration for Ørlygur the Rich, who had become his gracious patron after the long, dreary months of enmity.

That evening when Ormarr had driven the sheep into the fold, he saw his father coming slowly towards him, and realized that Ørlygur wished to speak to him.

The two sat down on the grassy wall of the paddock.

“Bjarni Jonsson has been up to buy the wool.”

Ørlygur spoke without any sign of triumph in his voice, and Ormarr evinced no excitement at the information. To both it seemed only natural and inevitable that the matter should have ended thus.

“Sera Daniel came with him.”

After this there was a pause. Then Ørlygur looked his son in the eyes. “Ormarr,” he went on, “I have something important to say to you. You are growing up now, and we must think of your future. Not yours alone, but that of your brother and the estate as well. In short, it concerns Borg. Have you any wish to take over the management of the place?”

“I don’t know. . . .” Ormarr gazed thoughtfully before him.

“Well, I will tell you what I have been thinking of today. Sera Daniel tells me that there are men in foreign countries

whose whole work in life consists in playing the violin. You understand, of course, that first of all they must learn to master it thoroughly. They are taught at schools, or by private teachers. Would you care to do the same—to learn to play properly—rules and notes and everything?”

“That means—going abroad?”

Ormarr’s voice trembled, and he turned a little pale. The golden bird of fortune and adventure flashed into the vision of his mind.

“Yes. I spoke to Sera Daniel about teaching you English as well as Danish. While you are in Copenhagen, you might find time to study other languages, without neglecting your music. Languages are always useful: if you become a great artist, you may have to travel in many countries, play your violin everywhere. Anyhow, you shall have the chance. Perhaps your liking for it may not last, or you may find you have not talent enough. If so, you can come back to Iceland again—to Borg if you care to. What do you think—would you like to try?”

“Yes, father—if you will let me. It would be wonderful.”

“I pray God I may be allowed to live a few years more. If you come back here, you will still have your birthright to the estate. But if you prefer to give up your claim, I will see that your brother is brought up to take over the place himself. The next few years will show what is best.”

Ormarr could not sleep that night. He lay weaving dreams about his future.

To him, it all appeared one bright, sunny vision. He pictured life as one grand triumphal procession. He knew that the country he was going to abounded in forests of bright-hued beech and dark pine woods; with lovely orchards, where ripe fruit hung on the trees ready for one to pick and eat. He had read of Danish gardens, where roses and lilac filled the air with their scent.

He counted the days now till he should be able to look with his own eyes on palaces he had known hitherto only from pictures in books—real palaces of kings! They would

be no longer castles in the air to him, but real; grand piles of solid stone and mortar. He could walk through their halls, breathe the air of bygone centuries that hung there still; could touch with his hands the very walls that had stood there for hundreds of years.

He painted for himself a future like that of one of the old Icelandic bards. He would play to kings and nobles. There was a lust of travel in his blood, of wandering through life by the royal road of glory and fame. It was almost painful to remember that he had ever thought of living all his days at Borg, as his ancestors had done.

The great world called to him, and every fibre in him answered to the call. He knew that there, where he was going, were wonderful machines contrived to do the work of men. He had never been able to think of such machines as really inanimate things; he longed to see with his own eyes the arms, hands, and fingers they must surely possess. Yet, at the same time, the thought of it made his flesh creep.

Think—to fill a room with light by the mere turning of a switch! And to talk with people through a wire—which he imagined as hollow. And there were places where conjurers worked miracles, and acrobats performed impossible feats; clowns jested and played tricks. . . . And gardens filled with cages of strange beasts from countries even farther off. . . .

All these and many other things which he had read of, and grown to consider as accessible only to a favoured few, were now to be part of his own surroundings in his daily life. He would live in a city with streets like deep chasms between unscalable cliffs—cave-hollowed cliffs peopled with human beings, instead of giants and goblins. He would go to theatres, where actors seemed to kill one another, and thunder, lightning, and snow could be brought into play within four walls. He would travel endless miles in machine-driven cars that raced along over rails of steel. . . .

Ormarr lay in his dark room, his eyes wide open, letting his fancy paint all manner of visions in the richest colours. His mind was overwhelmed by a turmoil of new sensations.

He tried to recall, one after another, all the pictures he had seen of things in foreign lands; even to portraits of celebrities, of jockeys galloping over turf, and sordid lithographs with impossible figures in ridiculous postures, such as he had seen stuck up in the local stores.

A fever of anticipation burned in his veins. And when at last, towards morning, he dropped off into a broken sleep, he was still surrounded by a crowd of the impressions he had conjured up while awake. They vexed him now; he found himself being thrown from cars that raced away from him at full speed, losing his way in gloomy streets and labyrinthine passages, being snatched up by the steel arms of strange machines and crushed to pieces; standing with one end of a wire between his teeth and vainly trying to speak to a famous man at the other end; he switched on a light and set the house on fire, and was only saved from being burned to death by waking to find the sun shining full in his face.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN a youth is thrown from the realm of fancy and solitude into a world of realities, one of two things takes place: either a process of reaction sets in, and he fortifies his soul in some faith or tradition; or he clutches greedily at life, becomes intoxicated by it, and loses his foothold. Whatever happens to him depends less upon strength of character than upon chance.

In Ormarr's case, reality fell short of his expectation in some respects, and in others exceeded it. He felt, also, as if he were born anew, entering upon an existence based on new principles.

With all that he had looked forward to most keenly he was frankly disappointed. On the other hand, he found an order of things, of people and their actions, so alien to his own mind and development that he felt himself an outsider, uncultured and inferior. It seemed to him then, that the only possible way to make up for lost time was to fling himself headlong into this human maelstrom and swim for dear life. And before he was himself aware of it, he was floating with the tide. He soon proved to have all the requisite qualifications for drifting so on the waters of life; he had means enough, and withal a pleasant manner, with a certain air of distinction, gay and yet self-possessed. . . .

It did not occur to him to consider whither he was drifting; there was no time to think. That he saw no land ahead or to either side did not trouble him in the least. Life was pleasant enough—and since its essential aim seemed to be that of making it pleasant, why trouble one's head about anything?

Fortunately, there was always one plank at hand to which he could turn for safety in case of need—unless he wilfully

thrust it from him. And as this resource in itself possessed an extreme fascination for him—the chance of becoming a great artist, a world-famed master—Ormarr never quite lost touch of it, though he found it at times somewhat burdensome, a check upon his natural movements towards pleasure and enjoyment.

His consistency in this respect was largely due to the personality of his teacher, Abel Grahl, who had taken a kind and fatherly interest in the boy from their first meeting. On the day after his arrival at Copenhagen, Ormarr set out from his hotel at a very early hour, and went in search of Grahl. Sera Daniel had instructed him to seek out this man and not rest until he had persuaded him to become his teacher.

“Your career may depend upon it,” were the priest’s parting words.

Abel Grahl was an elderly man, and life had used him hardly. At twenty, he had stood on the threshold of fame: his first appearance as a violinist, in London, had created an unusual stir. Offers of engagements came to him in plenty, but the day before he was to start on a tour, embracing the principal cities of the world, he had managed to hurt his finger slightly while out boating with some friends. Blood-poisoning set in, and the finger had to be amputated. Then for three years he was lost to the world; his friends and relations believed him dead. Suddenly he reappeared in his native town of Copenhagen, a silent, retiring man; no one ever learned where or how he had spent the intervening years. Even his intimates refrained from asking, partly out of regard for his grief, partly for fear of reopening some trouble not yet healed. He made his living as a teacher of music especially with the violin; but his pupils were few, since he mercilessly rejected all save those who showed unusual promise.

He lived a solitary life, in a suite of rooms badly in need of repair. The landlord had given him permission to remove the inner partitions, and turn the whole place into one big studio; the kitchen he used as a bedroom.

Grahl was not in the best of tempers on being awakened

at six in the morning by a continued and vigorous ringing at the bell. But at the sight of his visitor, a lad in ill-fitting homespun clothes, with a calfskin bag tucked under his arm (Grahl at once divined that it contained a violin), he found some difficulty in keeping his countenance. He looked at the boy with a faint, good-humoured smile.-

Ormarr endeavoured to explain, in very imperfect Danish, the object of his visit.

The old man burst out laughing. Then, noticing the boy's confusion, he asked him in, and patted him encouragingly on the shoulder.

"Do you mean to say you have come all the way from Iceland to learn the violin? What did you say your name was?"

"Ormarr, son of Ørlygur à Borg."

"I see, Ormarr à Borg, then,"

"Yes, Ormarr Ørlygsson."

"Ormarr Ørlygsson. And how did you manage to find me?"

"It was quite easy. I had the address written on a paper, and asked the way."

"Yes, yes—but I mean, who told you to come to me?"

"Sera Daniel—the priest. I was to come to you and get you to teach me—you and no other. He said my career might depend upon it. And he said if you refused, if you sent me away once or twice or more, I was to try again."

"H'm. Seems clear enough. And you look as if you were the sort to do it. Well, let me hear what you can do with that instrument of yours."

Ormarr took out his violin. He was visibly nervous, and it took him some time to tune up.

Abel Grahl could not help remarking to himself that the boy seemed awkward—and perhaps he did not even know his notes. Anyhow, he refrained for the moment from further questioning.

At last Ormarr ran his bow across the strings, put down his bow and violin, took off his coat, and rolled up his sleeves to the elbow.

Grahl watched him, making no sign. He was rather surprised to find himself really interested, and waited impatiently for the boy to begin.

As Ormarr took up his instrument again, the old man asked:

"How old did you say you were?"

Ormarr hesitated. "Fifteen," he said at length.

Grahl shook his head in despair. Then he checked himself.

"Well, well, we shall see. Go on now, if you are ready."

Ormarr began to play, without watching the other's face. He did not see how the man's expression changed from mere resignation to intense feeling, that drove all the blood from his face. Now and again he frowned, and started slightly, but repressed himself, and left Ormarr to finish at his will.

Ormarr played for ten minutes. At the last stroke of the bow, Grahl leapt to his feet.

"Who wrote that?"

"It's—it's only about a sunset."

"Yes, yes, but where did you get hold of it—the tune?"

"I made it up myself."

Grahl stared at him, but the boy never flinched. No, those eyes could not lie!

"What else can you play?"

"There's all the songs they used to sing at home. And the hymns from church."

"Can you play at sight?"

Ormarr shook his head doubtfully.

"I mean, do you know the written notes?"

"No; I was never taught." Ormarr felt crushed at the confession.

For fully a quarter of an hour he was kept in suspense; it was like waiting for the summons to execution.

Abel Grahl walked up and down. Now and again he stopped full in front of the boy, scrutinizing him from head to foot. Then he shook his head as if in dismissal, turned away abruptly, and stood for a while at the window, whistling softly to himself; came back and stared at Ormarr once more, looking hard into the dark, glowing eyes that seemed

to have grown dim. Who could say how much it might mean to this lad if he sent him away? He felt, too, that those eyes could express something more than despair.

He felt himself drawn toward this child of nature who had been flung at him, at it were, like a ball, from hundreds of miles away—if he did not take it but threw it back, would it land safely, or would it be lost in the sea?

At last he spoke, though he had not yet made up his mind.

"It is a difficult thing to study—and it means years of work. Also, it will cost a great deal of money. Where are you to get that from?"

"From my father."

"And what is your father?"

"A farmer."

"Is he rich?"

"Yes."

"What is he worth, about?"

"He owns all Borg, and . . ."

"I mean, how many thousand . . .?"

"Three thousand."

"Three thousand—is that all?"

"Yes. No one in Iceland has more than three thousand sheep. He has more than any one else there."

"Sheep—I see. A biggish place, then. Many horses?"

"I don't know how many exactly. There are many—*stodhross*."

"*Stodhross*—what's that?"

"Horses that live out on the hills. But we've a hundred and twenty at home, on the place."

"The devil you have. And how many cows?"

"About a hundred most times."

"Do you know any one here in Copenhagen?"

"No. But the priest, he gave me a letter to a man I was to ask to keep my money for me, if you did not care to be troubled with it."

"Have you much with you now?"

"I have a thousand Kroner in my pocket-book, and a few small notes in my purse."

"H'm. I suppose you can look after your money all right yourself?"

"Oh yes, I have it . . ." He thrust a hand into his pocket.

"No—I must have left it under my pillow."

"Under your pillow—where?"

"At the place where I slept."

"What on earth—Here, we must go along at once. Put on your coat—no, never mind the violin. Where are you staying? What street?"

"I don't know what street it is."

"But good heavens, child—the name of the hotel, then?"

"Hotel H——, it is called. Sera Daniel told me to go there the first night."

They reached the street, and Grahl hurried on ahead to where some cabs were standing. Hailing one, he gave the address, hurried the boy in, and followed himself.

In the vestibule of the hotel they were met by the porter, who advanced with a discreet smile, and handed a pocket-book to Ormarr.

"You don't seem to care much for your money, sir. The maid found this little sum under your pillow."

The little episode was not perhaps, in itself, the decisive factor in establishing the ultimate relationship between Ormarr and Grahl. But it certainly did much to link them closer, and from that time forth, Grahl assisted the young Icelandic in many other ways, apart from merely teaching him the violin.

Ormarr succeeded from the first in winning the old man's affection, and making him interested in his career. He was a constant source of surprise to his teacher. First and foremost, there was his sudden transformation from chrysalis to butterfly—from a peasant lad to a man-about-town.

And Ormarr caused his teacher grave anxiety during those years. But he never betrayed the confidence the old man had shown at first. And in point of musical development he surpassed all that Grahl had ever hoped for.

By the tenth winter, Grahl considered his pupil as perfect at least as he himself had been when he had first appeared in

public. All that was needed now was to introduce him to an audience. The day for his début was fixed, and the large room at the Concert Hall engaged.

For some time past, whispers had been current in musical circles about Abel Grahl's wonderful pupil. All were eager to hear him, and every seat in the big hall was taken far in advance.

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Ormarr had rooms on the outskirts of the town, looking out over the Sound. In course of time, he had managed to get the apartments furnished to his taste. The walls were hung with rugs, an enormous divan occupied the centre of the room, a few small tables stood about here and there, and the four big chairs were packed with cushions. The divan served as a bed at night; in the daytime it was covered with a splendid Persian rug. Black, white, and brown sheepskins were spread on the floor, and in front of the divan was flung the pelt of a huge white bear.

Not a single picture was to be seen. But on the walls, hidden behind the hangings, Ormarr had placed large reproductions of well-known portraits of great composers. And when playing, he would uncover the picture of that particular master with whose work he was occupied for the moment.

On the day before his first concert, Ormarr was resting, fully dressed, on the divan. He was smoking; a bottle of wine and a glass stood within reach on a small table.

He had been out for his usual morning walk. But for the last three hours he had not moved. It was now drawing towards twilight. His glance moved idly from one window to the other, following the race of clouds against the background of a dull blue sky.

There was a knock at the door. Languidly Ormarr rose to open. He recognized the voice of his friend, Aage Blad.

Save for Grahl, Ormarr's only intimate friend was the young poet, Aage Blad; the two were constant companions. Blad's earnest love of life had endeared him to Ormarr, and

though the latter, true to his adopted rôle of insincerity, often made fun of his friend's seriousness, the poet had soon realized that it was not meant, and as a rule paid no heed to it. But if ever he found that he had gone too far, Ormarr always relapsed into silence, and his friend understood that this was his way of asking forgiveness.

Blad glanced at Ormarr's face as he entered, and gathered at once that his friend was not in the best of spirits. He shook hands in silence.

Ormarr flung himself down on the divan once more, leaving his visitor to make himself at home. Blad moved up a chair, and the two friends smoked in silence for a while, watching each other.

"Nervous?" queried Blad at last.

"Wish I were!"

"Curious thing to wish. Thank your stars you're as cool about it as you are. Anything wrong?"

"Oh, everything."

"Oh, that's no trifle, anyway."

Silence.

"I tell you what, Ormarr, I shan't feel comfortable myself until this concert's over. Honestly, I'm getting quite feverish about it. I've never been so excited about one of my own things coming out—not even my first book."

"No need for you to get excited that I can see."

"No need at all—you're right, of course. It's bound to go off all right."

"On the contrary—there's everything to be anxious about. Everything—everything. Oh, well, hang it all—have another drink."

Ormarr threw himself back and closed his eyes.

Aage Blad sat watching him; there was a dull, resigned expression about the corners of the mouth; the forehead was already deeply lined. There was strength as well as weakness in the face, he thought. "A strange fellow," he told himself.

They smoked in silence for a while. Then, without opening his eyes, Ormarr said:

"It is a long time since I saw my home. Funny thing, not feeling home-sick all these years. Can't understand it just now. I never longed for home till this winter. As soon as the summer comes I must go back. Like to come too?"

"H'm—I don't know. Iceland—the very name of it makes me shiver. Anyhow, you'll have to redeem that fur coat you gave me—extravagant person that you are."

"But it's not so cold at home. Not in the summer, at any rate. The coldest thing about Iceland is its name. And the nights there—so wonderfully calm and light they are in spring. . . . It's a long time to wait till the spring. I wish I were back home again now. I've never seen a sky so blue and deep as there. Before I came to Denmark I had an idea that in a flat country one would see more of the sky than at home, with all the mountains and their shadows. But then the mountains are so far away. And once you get there . . . Aage, I would give all the forests in the world, all the orchards and cornfields and flower gardens, for a single mountain. But a real one, mind you, with huge rocky ridges, and green plateaus, and snow at the top. Good heavens, man, to think that I have one all to myself—yes, I own a mountain. I never thought of it before. Can you understand how I ever could stay away from it all so long? But I'm going back now—going home."

"There's the concert first, don't forget—tomorrow. And you're going to be famous."

"Tomorrow . . . yes. . . ."

Ormarr had sat up, resting on his elbow, while he spoke of his home. Now, he threw himself back once more, as if exhausted, and lay with closed eyes as before. For a few moments neither spoke.

"Aage," said Ormarr at last, "I feel tired—deadly tired. I've been idling here all day. Tomorrow? I feel as if tomorrow were already a thing of the past."

He got up, filled his glass and that of his friend.

"Drink! Aage, I've something to tell you. Just let me go on talking, and don't bother about it, I only want to get

it out. What do you think I've been seeing all the time, lying here with my eyes shut? This is no life for me. I have been counting. It is my tenth winter here now. Ten years, man—think! And today it seemed as if I had come yesterday. I have been asleep—fast asleep. But it can't go on. There's something hurting me, a sort of longing—Oh, I know it sounds all nonsense, but you needn't worry about that. . . . No, this won't do. I don't go on drinking and enjoying life in this wasteful, silly fashion—and forgetting. I wasn't made to live like that. I was made to think, and to work. And now here have I been living for ten years—yes, and working hard, I know—but all for nothing. It means nothing at all, really. Famous? If I found myself famous after tomorrow, I should be no better off than I am now. I've no ambition of that sort any longer—not a scrap. I never realized it before—it's only just lately I've seen it. And think of dear old Abel Grahl! Do you know, honestly, I believe he's jealous—the dear old boy! He's fond of me, I know; and now that I'm on the eve of my 'conquest,' as he always says, he thinks of the time when he made his conquest—and fate overtook him after. I'm sadly afraid that old trouble's cropped up again now with him. And after all, what is there to envy, anyway? What sort of a future if I do succeed? The life of a flunkey—a menial in gold lace, playing for money—and to whom? I've been studying my fellow-creatures this winter—musical people—my audience-to-be. Copenhagen's not the world I know; but human beings are much the same everywhere, I take it, though their looks and manners may differ somewhat in detail. Grahl has been taking me about. He hates 'society,' I know, but he took it all up again for my sake—that's the sort of man he is. It all helps, he says. Oh, and you should have heard their talk, their hard-and-fast opinions, and the views of the professional critics. Sometimes I feel I simply can't go on living. Simply can't stand it. What wretched caricatures we all are—myself included. No I've finished with this sort of life. There's not a thing in the world I care for now, except to go back home. If only I could be

sure *that* was a genuine feeling, and not another delusion. Don't look down on me, old man—Heaven knows, I've no great thoughts about myself just now. You know me well enough to see that I'm not drunk. But I feel—oh, just worthless. All these years—and living like this—it's too contemptible. I feel as if I hadn't an atom of will-power left. Just sick and tired of everything . . . and longing, aching for something. . . . Good of you to listen so patiently. Have a drink."

Blad was silent for some time, and when at last he spoke it was in a low voice.

"There's something I should like to say to you," he said quietly. "And I'm half afraid to begin. I've been thinking a lot, and some of it I mustn't say at all. But I will say this: When we have been together anywhere—out in the country, or on the sea, or in the town—anywhere, I always had a feeling that we lived as it were on different levels, you and I. To me, you were always the born leader; I felt if you took it into your head to order me about, I should have to obey. Things seemed somehow to belong to you. Then at other times, I could feel as if you were a distinguished visitor—one can't help these stray thoughts, you know—as if Nature herself put on her best and did all she could to please you—while I was just an ordinary person, not worth making a fuss about. I belonged to her, as one of her children, and could stray about unnoticed among the trees like any other creature in the forest; it never came into my head to look on her in that gay lordly way of yours. And sometimes it seemed you were the better off; sometimes that it was better to be as I was. It's all only fancies, of course, but still it does prove one thing: that we are utterly different. I am quite content to live an ordinary uneventful life; as long as I can ramble about in Nature's garden and cultivate the modest growths of my art, it is enough for me. I don't care for anything that calls for greater energy than I generally give, whether it be the way of pleasure, or pain, or work. I've no ambition worth mentioning. I can sit in my garden, and enjoy the scent of the flowers, or go out in a boat, and

watch the sunlight on the water; walk in the woods in spring and see the delicate green of the beech leaves against the sky—I am happy enough with such things. There are heaps of little trifling things of that sort that please me every day. But it's all different with you. It may sound theatrical, perhaps, but it's as if you had mountains—glaciers and volcanoes—in your soul. And I shouldn't care to change with you—it's all too big for me. But then again, if you were like me, I shouldn't care about you. You must live and act in a different way; I see that. You could stand suffering better than I; I'm sure of that. But I'm not quite sure that you have the power of being really happy. Anyhow—well, you know I'm your friend, and always will be."

"I know that, Blad."

Ormarr got up, switched on the light, looked through a bundle of newspapers and found the one he was looking for. Nervously he turned the pages till he came to the shipping intelligence.

"There is a boat leaving the day after tomorrow."

He dropped the paper, walked up and down the room several times, shaking his head defiantly, as if at his own thoughts, then threw himself down in a chair. A moment later he glanced at his watch, and rose reluctantly.

"It's time I went round now—to Grahl. The final rehearsal. . . ."

In the big room where, ten years before, a curious figure of a boy in ill-fitting clothes had called on him for the first time, Abel Grahl sat at the piano accompanying the later stage of that same youth—now a slender, palefaced young man. They were playing a nocturne—the only one of Ormarr's own compositions on the morrow's program. The theme was that same one of the sunset with which Ormarr had introduced himself to his master, only the technique was different.

Ormarr looked out through the window as he played, seeing nothing in particular. As long as he held his violin, his

soul lived only in the magic world of melody that flowed from the strings.

Grahl's accompaniment was strangely absent and mechanical. His figure was bowed at the shoulders, and the black coat he wore accentuated his thinness. He had aged much of late, and looked haggard and worn. Now and again he turned his head towards his pupil with a searching glance.

When they had been through the whole of the programme, Grahl remained seated at the instrument, striking one chord repeatedly, his eyes fixed on nothing. The corners of his mouth dropped in a bitter smile. Then, turning to Ormarr, he said in a queer, strained voice:

"Play that Andante once more, will you? Not that you need it—it couldn't be better. Just play it for me."

And Ormarr played.

When he had finished, Grahl spoke, without looking up, as to himself:

"That was one of the things I played at my first concert. I did not play it as well as you—no, not half so well. I doubt if Beethoven himself ever played it better!"

For a while he sat with bowed head. Then raising himself suddenly, he ran his fingers over the keyboard, and the gay tones of the "*Valse d'Espagne*" danced like demons out upon the silence that had followed Beethoven's Andante.

Ormarr, who had been standing deep in thought, looked round with a start; Grahl rose from the music-stool with a harsh laugh.

"A fancy of mine," he said shortly, "to let Waldteufel loose on the heels of Beethoven."

He went across to the table, lit a cigar, and slipped into an easy-chair.

Ormarr followed his movements intently. There was a strange expression in his eyes, and the lines on his forehead and face seemed deeper than usual.

Grahl paid no heed to him; he was smoking, and evidently occupied with his own reflections. When Ormarr moved, he looked up, and pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Ormarr; not time to go home yet. Take a cigar."

"Thanks."

Ormarr took a cigar and lit it, covertly watching the expression of the old man's face.

"Sit there, Ormarr, where I can see you; that's it. I was thinking, there's not much left of the peasant lad who came up here that morning ten years ago. The eyes are the same, yes; and a look about the face—I've noticed it the last few days. . . . Anyhow, it was as well I didn't send you away that day after all."

Ormarr felt his cheeks flush, and bent forward in his chair.

"My dear Grahl, I feel myself a man now in most things, but there's one thing that has stuck to me since I was a child. I never could thank any one in words. And I don't know how to thank you in any other way. . . . I'm sure no father ever did more for his son than you have done for me. I hardly know how any one could do more for a fellow-creature than you have."

"Oh. . . . And what is this, if you please, if not thanking me in words?"

"You know yourself how much I owe you—you know I don't exaggerate things as a rule. . . ."

"There, Ormarr, that's enough. You must have seen what it meant to me all along—the joy and delight of teaching you. No more pupils now for Abel Grahl. You are my last—and my greatest. If I could find one greater still . . . ? I don't think I shall live to be roused from my bed a second time at six in the morning by a lad with his fiddle in a calf-skin bag and the promise of fame in his eyes."

Ormarr laughed at the thought. A moment later he was serious once more. And Grahl went on:

"You'll go travelling about the world, giving concerts here, there, and everywhere. I wish I were strong enough to go with you."

Ormarr laughed again, but without heartiness.

"Grahl, my dear master, why not? Come with me! Nowadays, with trains de luxe and floating palaces, it will be pleasant as could be. And at least I should have some one to play for."

"I . . . to travel . . . after all? It's late in the day . . . and not exactly the way I had once thought. . . ."

Ormarr sprang to his feet, but sat down again.

"Grahl, you are my friend—the best I have, I think. I must tell you something now—something that has happened to me. Listen: I do not care about the concert tomorrow—it means nothing. Fame is nothing to me now. To tell the truth, I shudder at the thought of going about playing for people I do not know, and should not care to know. Strangers—foreigners! It makes me a piece of common property; one of the artistic wonders of the world. And then to see my name, my portrait, on huge posters everywhere . . . read interviews with myself, criticisms of my art—Grahl, the thought of it sickens me. I won't—I can't—oh, if only I could get out of it now, before . . ."

"Why, boy . . . Ormarr, my dear lad, what is this? what has come over you? Surely you do not—you could not think of throwing everything away now—burning your ships? Ten years of hard work—yours and mine. . . . If there were any risk, I could understand perhaps your being afraid . . . but as it is . . . you have only to show yourself—one first appearance, and the thing is done. No, Ormarr, you could not draw back now. It would be madness—nothing else."

"That may be. But none the less, that is how I feel. I have lost all desire to show myself, to appear in public. I do not care for any 'conquest.' I could do it, I know. But that means that in reality I have already conquered. It is satisfaction enough to me; I need not show myself on a platform to utter strangers who have paid so much for the right to hear me play this or that. Every item on the programme as a right—and extras in return for their applause. No—if you cared, I should not mind playing to you every day, for hours together—to you alone. Or to any others that I cared

about. Come back with me to Iceland. I will look after you, be a son to you, take care of you, in every way. But spare me this; release me from the burden of that concert and all that should come after it."

"Ormarr—you must be out of your senses."

"Whether or no, I am what I am. And I can't be otherwise. I am furious with myself too; blind fool that I have been—oh, you don't know what I feel at this moment."

Ormarr noticed that Grahl was feeling for his watch.

"Don't," he put in hastily. "I don't want to see any one tonight. I can't stand it. I don't know what may happen. . . ."

Abel Grahl rose from his seat. When he spoke, his voice was calm and earnest.

"Ormarr, remember I stand to you in a father's stead. You cannot get away from this. Where is my son, who had grown to be a man of the world? We had grown out of stage fright, nerves and all that nonsense, surely? Tomorrow is our concert. We must not forget it, we must be there in time. But beyond that, we need not give the matter a thought. There—that's the way to look at it. Don't forget."

Ormarr paled slightly.

"Very well—have it your own way."

A car was heard hooting outside, and they went out.

.

Ormarr stood on the platform of the Concert Hall, playing the Andante from Beethoven's Sonata. This was the third item on the programme. The first had been a show piece, from Tchaikowsky, which had given him an opportunity of displaying his extraordinary skill and masterly technique. After the second, his own nocturne, it seemed as if the applause would never end. The audience was delirious. The atmosphere of the nocturne, with its melancholy depths and wild heights of joy, its bewildering beauty and strange transitions, moved the dense crowd as if by magic.

The appearance of the young artist had fascinated his

listeners from the outset. Despite the air of superiority and composure, there was nothing of arrogance in his bearing. At the first entry of this young man, with the pale, lean face and the half-closed eyes that yet seemed to see everything, and see through every one, the audience felt the magnetism of an extraordinary personality.

Success was certain, inevitable. From the very first, the audience had surrendered unconditionally.

As he stood there playing, Ormarr appeared quite calm and collected. Not the slightest tremor of the body, no trace of expression on his smooth face, betrayed the struggle raging within. But Ormarr himself knew that it was merely a question of time; up to a certain point he might control himself—after that, the deluge.

Two men there were, however, among those in the hall, who suspected something of the strain it cost him to keep his rebellious temperament in check: they knew that his apparent calm was but a mask. The two were Blad and Abel Grahl, sitting together in the front row.

The serene progress of the *Andante* was undisturbed by any sound from those in front. Ormarr felt as if his listeners were turned to stone, and his playing was caressing them like a gentle breeze.

Then suddenly there came over him an irresistible desire to jerk them back to life—to startle them, set them fluttering and cackling like a pack of frightened fowls. To tear at their sense, to render their innermost souls, to fling at them, like a fiery volcanic eruption, something unexpected and terrible—something unheard of.

In a fraction of a second it had come. A bursting of all bonds that chained his ungovernable mind: reason, duty, ambition, the fear of consequences. It was as if in a moment he flung from him the prejudices and traditions in which men are wont to dress, and stood there before them in primeval nakedness.

He saw Grahl trying to rise: trying to prevent something he knew was coming. . . .

And half unconsciously, as if it had been the most natural

thing in the world, he plunged blasphemously from Beethoven's Andante into Waldteufel's "Valse d'Espagne."

Ormarr was cool and calm as ever, but pale as a ghost. The music raced away madly into the waltz, laughing and crying in complete abandon.

A feeling of something uncanny seized the audience for a second; as if icy waters had overwhelmed them in flood, depriving them of movement, suffocating all cries for help.

Grahl rose to his feet, and opened his mouth as if to cry aloud. Then he fell back in his chair, without a sound.

Suddenly Ormarr stopped playing; his arms fell to his sides, and he stood on the platform laughing—a tremulous, uneasy laugh. Then he turned and fled.

A storm of shouts and noise rose up from the audience. The silence of enraptured listeners had given place to the confusion of a disturbed ant-hill. Some questioned, others raged, a few broke down entirely.

"Scandalous!" "Mad!" sounded through the din. Several minutes passed before any thought of leaving. Then suddenly the word "dead" began to circulate. And gradually the crowd grew quiet, and dispersed, moved to forgiveness by the thought that the madman had ceased to live. Only a few were aware that it was not the player who was dead.

.

Ormarr reached home and let himself in—not until then did he notice that he had walked all the way without hat or overcoat, still carrying his violin.

After all, what did it matter? His mind was in a state of utter indifference to everything; completely numbed.

His shoes were muddy, his dress coat wet through; he raised his hand to his forehead and wiped the rain from his face.

His throat was parched; he felt nervous and ill. He fumbled about for whisky and a syphon, drained one glass at a draught and poured out another. Then, drenched and dirty as he was, he threw himself down on the divan, without a thought of changing his wet things.

The blood throbbed in his temples; there was not a clear thought in his mind. When he shut his eyes, he felt as if a wheel were tearing round at a furious rate inside his head.

The door bell rang—it was Blad.

“Grahl is dead!”

Blad threw down Ormarr’s hat and coat, which he had been carrying; he himself was out of breath, and overpowered with emotion.

“Grahl—dead?” Ormarr sat bowed forward, his hands clasped, his eyes staring vacantly before him. Blad stood watching him for a moment. Then he burst out:

“You—you must be mad!”

“I suppose so—yes.”

“And—you don’t care in the least?”

Ormarr made no reply.

“Think of the scandal of it all!”

Still Ormarr said nothing.

“And then—Grahl! That ought never to have happened.”

“I suppose not.”

“Do you mean to say it is all nothing to you—that you have ruined your own career for ever, and killed Grahl—your friend—your teacher? After that—oh, but you must be insane, there’s no other word for it.”

“Very well, then.”

“Were you drunk?”

“Drunk? No, I wasn’t drunk. But do let’s talk of something else. It’s no good discussing this any more. It’s done, and can’t be undone. I am going back home—to Iceland. There’s a boat leaving tomorrow. Take off your coat, won’t you—you’re going to stay now? Mix yourself a drink, man, do.”

“No, thank you.” Blad spoke coldly, flinging out his words, and pacing the floor excitedly.

“Have I hurt you too? I can’t think how I could have done that. Surely you can’t feel hurt at my being what I am, and doing what I can’t help doing? I asked you to stay just now, because I thought you were my friend. If you are no longer my friend, then you had better go.”

"Really, I almost fancy you would like to turn me out now because I decline to drink with you to Grahl's happy decease. By Heaven, you do not deserve that I should stay."

"Oh, you damned fool—who's talking about what I deserve!"

Blad stopped suddenly, as if paralysed by the word. Then in a voice heavy with emotion, he said:

"Ormarr—that was the first ugly word I have ever heard you use. And it was said to me—to me!"

"To you—yes. But you made me angry, you know. Up to then, I was only miserable—and so hopelessly tired. And here you are reproaching me for things I could not help. And really, you know, when you are so utterly foolish as to measure me by your standards, I can't call you anything else. I don't repent what I did tonight. How can a man repent things that *happen*—things over which he had no control whatever? But I do repent—or at least, I am sorry—for what happened before—for what brought it all about. Grahl was my friend and benefactor—and yet I cannot feel any grief at his death. I simply can't think at all at the present moment; haven't a single atom of emotion in me. I'm just a wilderness. Oh, if you knew what I am suffering now—death would be welcome; a relief. There's just one thing that grows and grows in me now—the need to go back, to go home."

"And your father—what will he say, do you think?"

"My father? I don't know. I wonder what he will say. It will be a big disappointment to him, this. How could I ever have done it? I don't understand myself now—it all seems so ridiculous; to lose control of oneself like that."

Blad started.

"Then—then you didn't do it on purpose?"

"Good heavens, no! Did you—could you think that of me? I suppose you fancied it was a new sort of advertising trick—well, why not?"

"Ormarr—forgive me. But you were so cool about it all—I never thought . . ."

"All right, never mind. We won't worry about it any

more. I'm dead tired. Stay here tonight, won't you? I'm not going to bed; no good trying to sleep. Stay and see me off; the boat goes at nine. Thanks, that's good of you. Get some sleep, if you can, yourself. There's a lot of things I'll want you to do for me while I'm away. Send me—no . . . no, I won't have any of these things here. You can take them over—keep what you care about and sell the rest. I want to forget these years—as far as I can. Though I've learned much in the time—and paid dearly for it. Now I am going home—going home to Iceland, and then . . . what next, I wonder?"

CHAPTER V

IT was a bright wintry day when Ormarr, watching from the captain's bridge, saw his native land rise snow-clad from the blue-green sea against a high, clear sky. The captain noticed that the fur-clad man who had been up on the bridge since early that morning to get the first glimpse of land, seemed strangely moved at the sight of it. Well, it was none of his business. . . .

Never before had Ormarr seen Iceland rising thus out of the sea; he had but a dim notion of the grandeur of the sight. Unconsciously, he had always thought of Iceland in the green of spring or summer, and had looked forward to seeing it so on his return. Being winter, of course, there would be snow. But he had never thought to see it all so white and clean and brilliant as now.

A vague joy filled him as he looked; he felt that his soul was come of the race of those great mountains, as of a line of kings.

Iceland—his country! Like a cathedral, a consecrated pile of granite, pure and holy in the seas of the far north. And the snow—how he loved it! And the rocks, the hills and valleys . . . the brooks and streams, sleeping their winter sleep now, under the ice. And fire too, the marvellous, merciless fire, smouldering quietly in its lava bed, yet strong enough to melt the ice of a hundred years in less than a minute and hurl it in huge floods of boiling water and red-hot rocks and lava down the mountain-side, through the valleys, out into the sea. What did it care for men, or their goods or their lives! All had to die. And better to die by fire or ice than on a bed of sickness. Far better to die young in some mighty upheaval than to drag palsied bones through a dreary wilderness of old age.

Ormarr smoothed his brow.

Why think of dying now? He was still young, and fit for action. Yet if Mother Iceland should think fit to crush him to his death in her embrace, well, he was ready. Well for him, perhaps, to find death on her icebound, fiery heart, if the road of life proved too wearisome.

Strange thoughts—was he mad, after all? He was thinking now as he had done so often when a child. But his dreams had changed. Then, Iceland had been the starting-point of his imaginings; it had been as a weight at his heel, keeping him in bondage, holding him back from all that he thought made life worth living. Now it was changed—now all his dreams turned towards it, centred round it—Iceland now was his home. Home? No, he had no home anywhere on earth. Yet he felt drawn towards it none the less; longing for his country. . . .

But what was this—Iceland—hovering above him, looking down at him—would she no longer receive him? Was he her child no more? Had the world worn away the marks by which his mother had known him?

Foolishness—his brain was running wild. And yet—how was it with him, after all? Was it not true that he was unworthy of love—a failure, self-condemned?

Iceland, towering in shining armour, in glittering flocs and spotless mantle of snow. And one coming to her from the outer world, with the dirt of alien countries on his feet, and the pain and weariness of the world in his heart. Her sacred places were no longer open to him now; closed, locked; the keys hidden far away, not there. Perhaps in the place whence he had come, perhaps far distant, on some other continent. Or hidden, maybe, on the other side of life.

Iceland! As he watched the land rise from the cold blue waves, he felt that he, who once had been her child, was no longer worthy to be so. He had sinned in coming back at all. And he vowed in his heart to set out once more in quest of the key that might unlock its holy places to him once more. Whatever happened, he must go away again. And if he

could not find what he sought, then there could be no return. Only let him first breathe the air here for a little while, tread the soil that had been his father's—men who had never shamed their native land.

Again he smoothed his forehead—the movement had become a habit with him whenever he wished to check or change a train of thought. And he laughed harshly.

“Well, Ormarr Ørlygsson, my friend and brother,” he thought to himself, “this time you are certainly mad . . . mad beyond cure . . . caught in the act—hysteria pure and simple.”

He sighed deeply—there was an ache at his heart.

“What is it?” he thought. “If I go on like this . . . if I let my thoughts and fancies play at will like this, I shall end as a lunatic: lose all control over myself, and be shut up somewhere—a pleasant prospect! Or at best, be allowed to go about at home in a living death: a beast with instincts and no soul, on the place I was born to rule. And father—to see his son an object of pity or contempt. . . . No: I must get away now, before something happens. Better perhaps not to land at all, but go on round the coast, and back with the steamer to Copenhagen.

“Well, we shall see. Most likely it would be the wisest thing to do. On the other hand, it would be cruel to father. . . .

“Wait and see. Let me at least feel the soil of my own country under my feet: touch the snow, drink its water, and breathe its air—satisfy myself that it is not a vision merely, no fairy tale, but a reality.”

At the first port Ormarr went ashore. He felt happy as a child, and laughed and joked with the crew. And when the boat neared the pier, he waved his hand to the crowd there, though he did not know a soul among them. They shrank back a little at the gay familiarity on the part of a stranger—but Ormarr did not care.

He set out on foot to explore the neighbourhood, a poor enough place it was. It was only with an effort that he restrained himself from walking up to the windows of the

little houses and looking in, or knocking at the doors, just to breathe the atmosphere of a home in his own country.

On an open space some boys were racing about playing snowballs. This was too much for Ormarr; before he knew it, he was in the thick of the fight, and in a moment he had all the lads on top of him. With shouts and laughter they pelted him from all sides, and ended by fairly burying him in the loose snow.

The boys stood around laughing heartily when at last, gasping for breath, he emerged; this was a first-rate playmate that had suddenly appeared from nowhere. Eager queries were hurled at him.

A tall, freckled peasant lad came up and asked his name, others equally inquisitive put their questions without giving him time to reply to the first. Was he from the steamer just come in? Where had he come from? From Copenhagen? What had he been doing there? Was he going on with the steamer again? If so, he would have to hurry; the second whistle had already gone.

And the whole crowd followed him down to the harbour, two of the smaller boys taking each a hand. When he gave them some small coin, they decided that he must be the new Governor at the very least, and felt some tremors at the disrespectful manner in which they had treated such a personage.

As the boat rowed off to the steamer, they stood on the pier waving their caps, and stayed there, waving and shouting as the vessel moved off.

Ormarr felt unspeakably grateful for this welcome from his country—a welcome of smiles, and snow, and youth; the glowing warmth that was in its element amid the biting cold. He felt himself akin to these lads, with their hands and faces warm and wet from perspiration and melting snow; who rolled about in the snowdrifts despite their clothing, braved the cold and the roughness of the elements, enjoying themselves in the depth of an arctic winter as well as in any tropical summer heat. They had no idea of modern precautions against climate.

There they stood, waving to him, acknowledging him as

one of their own, never dreaming that he had been about to drift away into an artificial life that nursed the frailties of the body regardless of health, until the body became a thing to loathe, unless the soul itself were cynically hardened.

This was the moment for action, the time to pull oneself together and decide; here was the way to follow—follow it!

But first of all, to find the right way.

Ormarr felt now that he could go back to his father. Could tell him all, confess that he had chosen a wrong path, a way whereby his body might have passed unscathed, but his soul never—it was never meant that the two should be divided. He must rest and think for a while and find a new road.

Once more Ormarr had climbed to the bridge, and remained there till the steamer touched at the next port. It would be a couple of days before he could reach home.

The day wore away, and night came down, but it was still quite light. The moon was high, right over the land, its white glow hovering over the landscape and giving it an air of unreality, like a spell that held all things in the bonds of sleep. The ship itself, chained to a silver beam, was the captive of this enchanted country, for all that it kept on its course; sooner or later, it seemed, the time would come when it must crash on a rocky coast.

Ormarr turned from the moon, forgetting the base designs which he had just attributed to its dull red bridge of rays. He looked at the stars—and suddenly he remembered the summer nights at home, when he had lain out among the hay in the fields, unable to draw his eyes from the twinkling golden points of light.

The northern lights flickered and faded, and showed up anew; like fiery clouds, appearing suddenly on one horizon, to vanish in a flaming trail behind another. Ormarr loved them—their restlessness, their capricious, fantastic shapes, the play of mood through every imaginable shade of colour—it was a silent musical display of heavenly fire.

.

Next day, the captain and Ormarr were alone on the bridge.

Each was occupied with his own thoughts, and both were gazing towards the shore.

The captain broke the silence.

"See there, Hr. Ørlygsson—that ring of mist there round the peak. Now, mist, I should say, is white as a rule, but looking at it there, against the snow, it looks just grey."

Ormarr made some brief reply; he was studying the face of the little Danish captain.

The latter spoke again:

"I don't know if you know this part of the country at all. When we round that point just ahead, you will see one of the strangest fjords all round the coast, though that's saying a good deal. Rocks sticking up out of the sea, sharp as needles some of them, and some all tumbled about in groups; some look like houses, and there are a few that make gateways, as it were, real arches, that you can take a ship through if you like."

"Then we shall be in very soon, I suppose—and up to time for once."

The little Dane drew himself up stiffly, glanced coldly at Ormarr, and said:

"Begging your pardon, sir, my ship is always up to time."

"Why, then, it is I who must ask your pardon, Captain Jantzen."

"Always excepting pack ice and being hung up by a gale," added the captain in a milder tone. "Otherwise, I admit you're right about being up to time generally—my ship's an exception, that's all. I put it plainly to the owners: either give me a time-table that I can keep to, or find another skipper. It's a point of honour with me, as you might say. As a matter of fact, there was another Iceland boat once came into port on the day fixed—only it was just a month late."

The captain laughed at his own jest, and Ormarr joined in. Then Captain Jantzen went on:

"Really, you know, it is a shame that there should be such a wretched service of steamers in these waters. There are several companies, I know, but they simply agree that there's

no sense in competition, so they keep up freights, and run their ships as they please. You may often have to wait weeks for a boat, and then find the sailing's cancelled for some reason or other. Yes, there's a chance for a man with energy and capital, that's certain."

Ormarr started at the other's words; it was as if a mist faded from before his eyes; here before him was a chance to redeem himself.

He turned to the captain and looked at him searchingly; a good man, by the look of him, and with determination in his face. Suddenly he noticed that the man lacked one finger on his left hand—strange, Abel Grahl too had lost a finger. The coincidence seemed to form a bond between himself and the captain. Fate, perhaps—why not?

He shook his head, smiling at himself for the superstition. Nevertheless, he asked the captain:

"Ever taken a turn with Fate, Captain Jantzen?"

The captain smiled, a mirthless smile that might have been a setting of his teeth.

"I should think so," he said, with an air of definite certainty, as if answering some question about a harbour he knew blindfold. "And if you haven't, I'll give you a bit of advice: take it by the horns straight away; don't wait on the defensive, attack at once. There's this about it: when luck favours a man, and he's sound enough not to get spoiled by it at once, sure enough, Fate will try to get a foot on his neck."

He stretched out his left hand towards Ormarr, showing the index finger missing, and went on:

"It cost me that. I was a deck hand on a fishing-boat at the time, though I knew the sea, and had many a rough turn with it, and saved more than one from drowning. And that's a thing the sea won't forgive. One day I was alone on the foredeck, getting the anchor ready, when there was a hitch in the cable. And then a thing happened that I've never known before or since—my feet slipped sheer away from under me, as if some one had pulled them. I came down headlong, and the anchor tore away to the bottom of

the sea, taking me with it. My finger was caught between two links of the cable—there was no getting it free. I thought to myself, 'Not this time, anyway,' and managed to get at my knife, and hacked it off. It didn't seem to hurt much while I was in the water—but when I came up—the men—believe me or not, as you will, but they started back when they saw my face. I hurried down below—I had a sort of feeling what it was. And I tell you, sir, there was the mark of death in my face when I looked; the mark Fate puts on a man before handing him over. And it was twenty-four hours before it passed off."

Captain Jantzen laughed.

"Since then, Fate's left me alone. Maybe she never found out how I'd cheated her. And if she has forgotten, why, maybe I shall live to be an old man after all." And as if repenting his levity, the little captain became serious once more.

"All the same, it's not right to joke about that sort of thing."

Ormarr had listened with interest to the captain's story. When he had finished, he was silent for a moment, then asked:

"How long have you been captain of 'Bjørnen,' Captain Jantzen?"

"Why, it'll be twelve years this spring." And in a tone of some resignation he went on:

"It's not likely I'll have her for another dozen years. Though I'd like to. She's a fine boat, and somehow we sort of belong to one another. But the owner's getting on now, and his health's not what it might be. And no sons. I fancy the other shareholders are not quite pleased with things as it is."

Ormarr walked up to the captain, and looking straight at him, asked abruptly:

"What about buying them out?"

Jantzen started, and looked inquiringly at Ormarr.

"I mean it."

"Well—yes, I dare say. It's a limited company. The biggest shareholder is the owner—and if any one were to

buy up all the other shares on the quiet, well, there's no saying . . ."

Ormarr and the captain seemed suddenly to have become remarkably intimate with each other—so, at least, it seemed to the others on board.

They remained for a long time in the captain's cabin, bending over a map of Iceland, discussing routes, tariffs, and traffic in a half-whisper. They talked of nothing but how many vessels and what size would be needed if one company were to take over the whole of the goods and passenger traffic between Iceland-Denmark, Iceland-Norway, and Iceland-Great Britain.

It was late when Ormarr shook hands with the captain and went to his bunk, with the parting words:

"Then the first thing you have to do is to buy up all the shares on the market. After that, get the old man to sell his holding—but to me and no one else!"

.

The following morning, Ørlygur à Borg was standing on the borders of his land, deep in thought. He had dreamed a strange dream the night before, and was trying hard to remember the details. One thing only stood out plainly in his memory. He had been standing on this very spot, a little hill just outside Borg, one day towards the end of summer. And there he had fought—with what, he could not say. But it was against something stronger than himself, something which would overpower him unless Ormarr, his son, came to his aid. Then suddenly he had seen a viking ship rounding the point, steering straight up the fjord. The sight of the vessel gave him new strength; he knew that Ormarr was coming to help him, and the ship was sailing faster than any he had ever seen. . . . Here the dream had ended abruptly.

Ørlygur stood on the hill, trying hard to recall more of the vision. As if to aid his memory, he looked out in the direction of the fjord. . . .

A steamer was rounding the point.

Ørlygur à Borg lost no time; he ran to the stables, and

saddled his horse. He was about to saddle another in addition, but checked himself—possibly it was only an important message. Anyhow, instead of mounting, he had a sleigh brought out, and drove off towards the snow-covered valley at full speed, reaching the trading station just before “Bjørnen” came in.

Ormarr was not a little surprised to find his father among the crowd of people gathered on the shore. Most of those present had recognized Ormarr where he stood on the bridge, and there was a general surprise at his appearance. No one had expected him. Only his father seemed to regard his homecoming as natural, and showed no sign of astonishment.

Ormarr was in high spirits and full of pleasant anticipation; he shook hands right and left. Ørlygur found it hard to conceal his emotion at the meeting.

Ormarr introduced Captain Jantzen to his father, but the latter spoke only a few words to the captain; he seemed intent on getting home without delay, where he could have his son to himself.

Before taking his seat in the sleigh, Ormarr took the captain aside:

“Remember,” he said, “you must get everything ready beforehand. First of all, a detailed scheme and tariff rates, for our calculations. I shall be here all winter. After that, I am going to England and France, to get the money. I shall get it, never fear. Anyhow, I shall see you next summer in Copenhagen. And then we can set to work in earnest. Be ready for a struggle when the time comes—it will take some doing, but we can do it. *Au revoir.*”

On the way out to Borg, the horse was allowed to choose its own pace; father and son were too engrossed in their talk to trouble about anything else.

Ørlygur could not quite understand his son’s attitude towards music and fame—possibly because Ormarr himself was loth to lay bare all the trouble of his mind. Moreover, he felt a different man already, far healthier in mind and body, after the last few days, as if separated by a wide gulf from the Ormarr who had left Copenhagen after the

scandal at the Concert Hall, a broken man, to seek rest and idleness in his own country.

Ørlygur could not altogether grasp his son's changed attitude towards the question of his musical career, which had cost ten years of his life and several thousand pounds. But he thoroughly understood and approved of his new plan for a better and cheaper and more reliable service of steamers between Iceland and abroad.

Ormarr pointed out the advantage of having an independent national steamship service, and Ørlygur at once perceived the possibilities of the scheme for furthering the development of Iceland commerce and industry. The idea of excluding other countries from participating here appealed to him, and gained his entire support for the scheme. The very thought thrilled the old chieftain's heart. Ay, they deserved no better, those slack-minded, selfish traders—they would only be reaping the results of their own shortcomings. They should no longer be allowed to monopolize trade, send up prices, make unreasonable profits, and do what they liked generally. There would be an end of their ill-found, ramshackle vessels, coming and going at their own convenience without the slightest regard for the public or their own advertised times. It was war—and he rejoiced at it. No question but that the people of Borg must win in the end.

As they were nearing home, Ormarr said:

"I am going to stay here this winter, father, before I set out again—Heaven knows how long it may be before I come back after that. I should like to live to enjoy one more spring here in Iceland. But after that, I must go abroad; work, work. It will take best part of the summer, I reckon, to raise the money—it will need a lot of money."

Ørlygur gazed thoughtfully at the landscape, and answered:

"Well, well—I suppose you are right."

For a while no sound was heard but the beat of the horse's hoofs and the creaking of the sleigh. Then Ørlygur said in a half-whisper:

"But—we have some money here, you know, ourselves."

Ormarr looked at his father keenly, and after a moment's thought he said:

"Look here, father, I will tell you what I have thought of doing about the money part of the business. I want to get the money without offering shares. It will be difficult, I dare say. But I must be independent here; I cannot bear to be bound by considerations of credit, or other men's interests, and that sort of thing. It would spoil the whole thing. The business must be my property; I will not have a thing that can be ruined by others after I have built it up. But if I should be unable to get the capital in the way I want it—why, then, I may come to you. Provided, of course, I can be sure of running no risk in the investment. I owe you too much already.—My inheritance, you say? I have not come into the property yet. But suppose we put it that way; that I owe so much to the estate. Anyhow, I owe it; it is money that must be paid, if things do not go altogether against us. For the present, I must fall back on you. But I shall not want much—nothing like what I have been drawing up to now. And I am proud that you are willing to help me, when I know I must have disappointed you by what I have done up to now."

"I trust you, Ormarr," his father said. "I do not quite understand, but I feel sure you were obliged to act as you did. The rest does not concern me. I know that you are honest and sincere, and I know that your aim now is not a selfish one."

For a time no more was said; both men seemed anxious to let it appear that their minds were occupied with anything rather than with each other. But for all his apparent calmness, Ormarr was overwhelmed with gratitude to his father; to the fate that had given him such a father; given him Borg for his inheritance, and suffered him to be born a son of this little nation. Ørlygur, on his part, concealed beneath an expression of indifference a feeling of pride and love for his son.

As the sleigh drove up in front of the house, all the servants came out to welcome Ormarr, with a heartiness that showed

plainly enough for all their quiet manner. A tall girl of about thirteen, with lovely flaxen hair flowing loose about her shoulders, appeared; this was Gudrun, a daughter of Pall à Seyru, now adopted by Ørlygur. Ketill was nowhere to be seen; Ormarr asked where his brother was.

Ørlygur smiled.

“Have you forgotten already? I wrote you in my last letter that I had sent him to the school at Rejkjavik. He wants to enter the Church, I understand. And I have been thinking that it would not be a bad idea later on, if he took over the living here. If, then, you decide to live abroad, as seems likely, and give up the estate here, then he could manage that as well. For the present, I have my health and strength, and hope to look after it myself for many years. We shall see.”

Of Ormarr's stay at Borg that winter there is little to be said. Every Sunday the people of the parish came up to hear him play the violin. He was delighted to play to them, and touched at their grateful, almost devotional, reception of his playing.

Spring came. The snow melted, and the rivers sent floods of muddy water and blue ice towards the sea. A great unrest came over Ormarr, and he left earlier than he had planned. So, after all, he missed the soft purity of the Iceland spring, the beautiful white nights with the glow of light on the fields and ridges pearled with dew. He missed the sight of the butterflies fluttering in gaudy flocks, and the birds among the little hillocks where their nests lay hid.

He had already felt the grip of spring at his heart when he saw the wild swans and other fowl heading for the still frozen heights farther inland, driving their wedges through the air, and crying aloud in joy of life. And that same viking spirit which had driven his fathers before him came on him now and drove him abroad in haste.

As he left Iceland for the second time, his father stood on the pier with moist eyes. Ørlygur remained there, watching till nothing was to be seen of the vessel but a few grey

wisps of smoke. Then he tore himself away, mounted his horse, and rode home, deep in thought.

If his blessing carried any weight, then surely matters would go well with his son.

He slept but ill that night; he was sorry he had not prevailed upon Ormarr to accept the money from him. It would have saved much trouble, and, at any rate, a certain amount of time.

If only Ormarr had come to him, rather than procure the funds he needed from others, and upon doubtful terms. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE cold, pure light of an autumn morning found the electric lamps still burning in a villa by the Sound.

It was the residence of Ormarr Ørlygsson, company director, a man well known in the business world, and bearer of sundry decorations.

The light shone through the rose-coloured curtains of the French windows opening on to a verandah facing the sea. The room was large; the arrangement marked its owner as a bachelor. It served as office, sitting-room, and study. The wall opposite the window was occupied entirely by shelves filled with books: works of reference and lighter literature. The other walls, each with a heavily curtained door, were hung with paintings, all representing Icelandic landscapes. In one corner was a heavy piece of bronze statuary, likewise Icelandic, "The Outlaw." The floor was covered with an Oriental carpet.

Ormarr sat at the big writing-table, his head buried in his hands. Lights burned in a crystal globe above his head, and in a reading-lamp at his elbow. The glow from the green shade of the latter, blending with the light of day, created a weird effect.

Ormarr had been sitting at his desk the whole night, going through piles of accounts and business papers.

For some time he sat thus, motionless. When at last he looked up, it was plain that thirteen years of work as a business man had left their mark on him. His face was thinner; his dark, rough hair was longer than was customary among men on the bourse, and the fact gave a touch of independence to his otherwise faultless appearance.

His expression was changed; the large, dark eyes were restless—a dreamy, far-away look alternating rapidly with

a glance of keen alertness. When alone, his look varied continually with his varying moods, but in the presence of others he kept rigid control over his features; the severest scrutiny could detect nothing of the workings of his mind. Two deep furrows slanted down on either side the mouth, completing the impression of resolute firmness combined with melancholy resignation and bitterness.

As he looked round the room, his eyes betrayed the trouble in his mind. He glanced deliberately at each of the things around him, works of art and furnishings, as if in farewell, dwelling now and then on some single item as if trying to fix it in his mind.

Gradually he began to realize that his first impression of the previous day was correct—he was a stranger in his own place. And he shuddered at the thought. Unconsciously he picked up the cable he had received the day before, smoothed it out before him, and read it over with bitter, scornful eyes.

“What a fool I have been!” he muttered. “I might have known . . .” And he laughed—a choking, unnatural laugh, and rose slowly to his feet. Languidly he drew back the curtain, opened the window, and stepped out on to the verandah.

Leaning on the railing, he looked out over the shore, with the troubled sea and the Swedish coast beyond. The view had calmed him often, but there was no rest in it now; he looked at it all impatiently, no longer able to find any comfort in visions.

All was changed now.

His clothes irked him; his hands were soiled with dust from the papers he had been busied with; a general sense of bodily discomfort pervaded him. And as if to escape from his emotional self, he left the room hurriedly; a bath and a change of clothes would be something at least. . . .

The housekeeper received her master's orders to serve lunch on the verandah with some surprise. It was a way of hers to appear mildly surprised at things and today there

certainly seemed some reason for astonishment: for thirteen years her master had never been at home to a meal at that hour of the day—why was he not at the office as usual? Ormarr's manner, however, forebade all questioning, and she did not venture to ask if anything were wrong.

Ormarr went to the telephone, and rung up the office, speaking coolly enough.

"That you Busck? Good morning. Captain Jantzen there? Morning, Captain. . . . No, nothing wrong, but something has happened. Yes . . . listen! You must hand over 'Bjornen' to the first mate this voyage. . . . What? Lose half an hour? Can't be helped; I want you here. Come out here at once, please, but first get the chief clerk to tell you what I want done about the shares, and do as he says. Then out here to me as quick as you can. I'll tell you all about it when you arrive. Right—good-bye."

A few minutes later the telephone bell rang. Ormarr took up the receiver with a gesture of annoyance, but on recognizing the speaker's voice, his manner changed.

"Yes—yes. Morning, Ketill. Ill? No, not a bit. Are you both there? Well, come out and have lunch with me instead. Don't know what we've got in the house, but come anyway. Eh? No, not a bit. I have been rather busy—up all night. . . . No, never can sleep in the daytime. Right, then. *Au revoir.*"

.

Ketill, now getting on for thirty, was already in orders, and was to be presented to the living of Hof in Hofsfjordur in the autumn, Sera Daniel being about to retire on account of age.

The original plan had been that Ketill should have spent a few days only in Copenhagen when going abroad in the spring, on his way to Switzerland and Italy, returning *via* England. But Ketill, who had preferred staying at an hotel rather than at his brother's, had soon found friends, largely owing to his brother's introductions. One of the acquaintances thus made was that of a banker, Vivild, whose daughter Alma had quickly captured Ketill's heart.

His tour of Europe, then, came to consist of but a few short trips, with Copenhagen as his headquarters. Ormarr had been surprised at this, but his brother gave him no enlightenment as to the attraction which drew him constantly back to the capital. Until one fine day Ketill announced his engagement and forthcoming marriage.

Ormarr had always looked on Alma as a tender plant, that could never be transplanted and live; the news surprised him. But he made no comment. Without realizing it himself, he had been deeply in love with dainty, sweet-natured Alma, but for no other reason apparently than a sense of his own unworthiness, had said no word of it to her. And here was his brother, holding the blossom himself, and tantalizingly inviting him to admire its sweetness.

The part of brother-in-law was by no means a pleasant prospect to Ormarr, but he reconciled himself to the thought.

Ketill—Sera Ketill, as we should now call him—was young and good-looking, with a pleasant and genial bearing. At times Ormarr could not help feeling that there was something a trifle insincere in his brother's geniality. Still, Ketill was a nice enough fellow to all outward seeming, albeit a trifle stouter of build than need be.

There was never any exchange of confidence between the two brothers; they knew, indeed, but little of each other. Ormarr was conscious of an involuntary dislike of Ketill; he tried in vain to subdue the feeling; it remained unaltered. Ketill, on the other hand, appeared not to notice any lack of brotherly love and sympathy. Neither of the two men realized that Ketill's nature not only did not invite, but rendered impossible any real confidence.

The first to notice this, albeit but vaguely to begin with, was Alma. The discovery troubled her a little, but she let it pass.

From all appearances, the union was a promising one, and the wedding was looked forward to by both parties with equal anticipation. The ceremony was to take place on the day before Ketill's entering upon his new dignity, and the bride was to accompany him to their new home.

Alma and Ketill arrived at Ormarr's house half an hour

after Ketill had rung up. Alma promptly went out to assist the housekeeper with the lunch.

The brothers, standing by the writing-table in the sitting-room, lit their cigarettes. Sera Ketill looked with unconcealed scrutiny at his brother's face, and with his usual affectation of heartiness said at once:

"Well, if you're not ill, you look precious near it. What's gone wrong now? Business?"

"That's as you like to take it."

"What do you mean by that? Nothing important, I suppose."

"Important?—well, in a way, it is." Ormarr passed the wire across to his brother, who read it through.

"Well, what does it mean?"

"It means that since yesterday I am—a millionaire."

"The devil you are—Heaven forgive me! Well, you are in luck. How did you manage it? Can't you tell a fellow how it's done? A millionaire! . . . Well, I'm . . . Lord forgive me! It's all right, I suppose?"

"Yes, it's right enough."

"Well . . . And what are you going to do now? Extend the business . . . new routes? . . . If you take my advice, you'll be a bit careful. Buy up the land in Iceland—that's a sound investment. Buy up Hofsfjordur. . . . What a lucky devil! . . . Lord forgive me! . . . But what are you going to do now?"

"I don't know."

"Well, anyhow, you can do things in earnest now. Monopolize the trade of Iceland. You control the traffic already; the people know you, and trust you—that's worth a lot in itself. They're not an easy lot to win—that way, but once you've got them . . . if you manage things properly, you're all right there. Ormarr, you're in luck. Look at me now—in orders. And even if I get the estate . . . The old man—father, I mean—he's getting childish already. Gives things away—money, live stock, food—you never saw. And he's struck off all outstanding debts the peasants owed him—it's whittling down the power of Borg to nothing. And

we ought to have kept it up. Ever since you paid back the money you had from him—it wasn't quite fair to me, you know, his letting you have all that—but anyhow, since you paid him back, he seems to think he's a millionaire, and can throw money about as he likes. Well, well, I'm fixed up now, I suppose. But you—millionaire, what are you going to do now?"

"I'll tell you . . . No, it's no use trying to explain . . ."

"Yes, yes, go on. What is it? New speculations? I'm interested in that sort of thing; go on."

"No, it's not speculation. I've had enough of that."

"Don't you believe it! When things turn out like they have done here. To tell the truth—I've been thinking of a little flutter on my own account. Old man Vivild's put me on to a good thing . . . but it seems you know the trick of it, so . . ."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't. Stick to Vivild if you're going in for that sort of thing. He's a sound man, and a clever one."

"Well, well, as you please. But I can't get over it. . . . A millionaire! . . . the dev—— Lord forgive me!"

After lunch the three sat together in a corner of the garden—Ketill and Alma side by side on a bench, Ormarr a little apart.

The conversation flagged somewhat; a few desultory attempts fell flat.

Suddenly Ormarr realized that his brother's manner was different when Alma was present. He had noticed something before . . . a curious abrupt change of mood, from lively jocularly to a sort of dreamy, thoughtful silence. But it had never occurred to him that it was Alma that brought about the change. Could it be a mask? In any case, the mask, if mask it were, suited him a great deal better than his normal appearance.

And as he watched them, Alma with her brown hair and bright dark eyes and Ketill with his heavy face and priestly

air of calm, a feeling of resentment rose in him against his brother.

"I love coming out here," said Alma suddenly. "It's so different to the atmosphere at home—business . . . Ugh."

Ketill smiled. But Ormarr laughed and said:

"I should have thought one would feel more at home in the atmosphere one grew up in. But, as a matter of fact, you are wrong about the atmosphere here—it is all business really, and nothing else."

"Father says you are not really a business man. And I think he is right."

"The facts would seem to prove your father wrong, Froken Vivild."

"He says you are—extraordinary. And that you've a lucky sense."

"Maybe. It comes to the same thing. I fancy success in business is largely a matter of luck. Do you know what has helped me most all along? Well, before I started in business, I was well known, in a way, from my efforts in another direction. Not to put too fine a point on it—people believed me mad. And, consequently, everything I set out to do was regarded as more madness. It was the best thing that could have been—and I'm very much obliged to the people who thought so. . . ."

A little later, Ormarr saw his guests to the gate, and stood watching them as they left, arm in arm.

"A lovely creature," he thought. "The graceful way she walks. . . . But a child, no more. And he—I wonder how he will treat her. I'm afraid she will have a hard time of it with him. Perhaps when all's said and done, she would have been better off with me."

He stood watching the dainty figure as it receded, noting the graceful curves, and the mass of brown hair under the wide-brimmed hat.

"A dream," he mused. "One of life's lovely dreams. . . ."

He closed the gate and walked up towards the house.

"No one to stop it . . . life must run its course. I dare not interfere—I may be wrong. And—in my case, it is too late now."

An hour later, Captain Jantzen was sitting in Ormarr's room, in his usual place, an arm-chair at one end of the writing-table.

Ormarr passed across a box of cigars, and rang for wine. Captain Jantzen was obviously ill at ease.

"Well, sir," he asked, "good news, I hope?"

"No, Jantzen; bad news." Ormarr hunted out the telegram he had shown Ketill, and passed it over. Jantzen read it through hurriedly, and glanced up quickly at Ormarr.

"If I remember rightly, we're on the right side here."

"That is so."

"Why, then—we are safe. This gives us a free hand now—we can cover all outstanding loans, we can out-distance all competition."

"Yes—and it puts me out of the game, Jantzen."

"How? I don't understand. . . ."

"No, I'm afraid you'd hardly understand. . . ."

"Well, sir, I confess as much. But there must surely be something behind this—I don't see. . . ."

"Only that victory has put me out of action, that is all. Ever since I started this thing, it has only been the difficulty of carrying it through that kept me to it. Now that is disposed of, I collapse. I can't live in that fruitful sort of country where you've only to plough and change your crops now and again—I can't work at a thing that runs by itself. It's not only that it doesn't interest me; I haven't the power of self-deception it requires. I'm perfectly aware of that. I feel at the moment like a bow that has been strung and drawn to its limit, and shot its bolt where it should. I've no use for repetition. And, take my word for it, if luck has favoured me up to now—in business, I mean—it would surely fail me after this. Once before in my life I have suffered the defeat of victory. And then, I chanced on you—it was Fate that led me to a new task; and with it, at the end, a new vic-

tory—a new defeat. True, the result has been somewhat different this time. But it comes to the same thing. I have done with the task—or it has done with me.”

Jantzen watched the speaker's face intently; he remembered the pale features of a younger man, who had stood with tears in his eyes, on the bridge of his vessel, at the first sight of Iceland from the sea. It was a face he had come to love—so strong it could be at times, and at times so weak.

And a deep despondency, such as he had only known in lonely watches far at sea by night, filled his heart.

Ormarr was absolutely calm and unmoved to all appearances; he seemed to have no regrets. He emptied his glass and nodded to Jantzen.

“There's no harm done, that I can see. What do you say to taking over the management yourself, Jantzen?”

“Impossible. I could never look after a business like that—I'm not built for it.”

“Nonsense, Captain. Don't tell me you couldn't run a line of steamers. The idea! I suppose the truth of it is you're unwilling to give up your ship.”

“That's true. I've captained 'Bjørnen' now for five-and-twenty years.”

“But the business is more important than a single vessel. Let's stick to the matter in hand—the business itself. I can no longer manage it myself. And you are the only man I can trust to take over. You must take it over. As for 'Bjørnen'—we can easily find another man. But if the business itself were now to pass into the hands of strangers, all our work will have been in vain; we should, in fact, have done more harm than good.—I suppose you will say that it is *my* duty to carry on. That's reasonable enough—as long as the course you propose is possible. But it is not possible any longer. It is simply this: I can control myself only to a limited degree; that you may take for a simple fact. And the limit is reached. What I am to do now I do not know. First of all, I shall go home—it is long since I was there. Anything in the shape of rest, or interruption, is dangerous to me, and that is why I have not been home to see my father

for thirteen years. But something tells me that he needs me now, though I have no idea in what way I can be of use. Never mind. I am subject to my instincts; to defy them would be a crime against myself—perhaps against a higher power. We are both of us somewhat superstitious, you and I. Anyhow, to come to the point. You, Captain Jantzen, will now acquire this business by purchase.”

“Purchase? Now you are joking. I might perhaps *manage* the business, if there’s no other way. . . .”

“That won’t do. You must buy it outright. As to terms, I shall be your only creditor, and you won’t find me a hard one to deal with.”

“But—by that arrangement, the management—the business itself—will be in Danish hands.”

“Where did you learn your trade, Captain? On the coasts of Iceland—working for a people not your own. And you will admit that you have more than a little sympathy with that little island and its people, obstinate though they may be at times. Also, it would be a good thing for my countrymen to realize that they need not always look upon the Danes as enemies.”

Ormarr took up his glass. “Well, here’s to the venture!”

Captain Jantzen’s hand trembled slightly, and he spilt a few red drops on the costly carpet as he drank.

“Since you will have it so, why, let it be. But I’m sorry about ‘Bjørnen.’ ”

CHAPTER VII

ONE evening towards the end of summer, two people were seated in the room at Borg which served Ørlygur as bedroom and sitting-room. They were an old man, grey-haired and stooping, and a pale-faced young woman.

The last few years had left their mark on Ørlygur à Borg. The stately bearing and alertness which had distinguished him in days gone by, had given place to a listlessness and an expression of gloom. There was little of the old masterfulness in the man who sat now on the edge of the bed, staring at the ruddy flicker of a tallow candle. His eyes were no longer keen and bright, but dull and spiritless, as at the present moment, or at times wandering anxiously, as if seeking aid against some threatening peril.

The young woman seated near him was finely built, with a wealth of flaxen hair, but seemed in ill-health and troubled in mind. Her whole bearing was one of resignation and despair. Her eyes were red with weeping; dark rings showed up beneath them from the pallor of her cheeks—the signs of restless nights and sad thoughts.

Twelve strokes from the big upright clock broke the silence, and startled Ørlygur from his musings. He glanced at the bowed form of the woman, and then at a letter which lay on the table.

Once more he conned the sentence which had brought such pain to himself and his adopted daughter—as if to make sure there had been no mistake. No, it was right enough: “I am engaged to a girl I met here this summer . . . Alma . . . daughter of . . . Married in a fortnight, just before I leave, so you can expect us both. . . .”

The letter was from his son Ketill.

And there, before him, sat the woman that same Ketill had ruined—and her state would soon be evident to all.

Some time back the girl's pale face and mournful bearing had moved Ørlygur to question her, and he had learned the cause from her own mouth. Runa, as she was called by all on the place, was at least as deeply attached to Ørlygur as to her real father, Pall à Seyru. And it had not been difficult for her to confide in him. The truth had come as a terrible shock to the old man, but both had consoled themselves with the thought that Ketill at least had no intention of leaving her thus betrayed; that he would behave as an honourable man. If not—why, Ørlygur would see that he did so.

But now, all unexpectedly, that consolation was destroyed, leaving a dark future indeed ahead.

Runa's trouble was not the only thing he had to bear; there were other matters that seemed to bode no good. And all were more or less connected with his son Ketill; Ketill, who was to inherit the estate and maintain the honourable traditions of Borg.

To begin with, things had looked well enough; excellent, indeed, in every way. The estate had grown richer since Ormarr had repaid the loans made to him, and the whole trade of the district was in the hands of Ørlygur's trusted men. The place was flourishing—thanks largely to Ørlygur's magnanimity in cancelling debts that proved too much of a burden—and the general state of affairs was healthy and promising. Then, in addition to the good name which Ketill would inherit, there was his position in holy orders. Altogether, the outlook for the family was one of dignity and honour.

Now, things looked otherwise. Some months before, Ørlygur had begun to learn something of Ketill's true nature; his selfishness and meanness; to hand over the estate to him seemed less advisable now than he had thought. Still, it should doubtless be possible to make him realize the duties and responsibilities of his position; to persuade him on matters where any danger threatened.

But the new development had raised an issue of a far more serious character. Once it were known abroad that the

master of Borg—as Ketill in time would be—had deliberately ruined a young girl,—a girl, moreover, under the protection of his father’s roof,—and had thereafter married another, probably for selfish considerations also, then the good name of the family, jealously guarded and built up through centuries, would be destroyed as by a flood. It seemed as if the fortunes of Borg were on the verge of ruin.

Ørlygur thought of these things—and the idea of disinheriting Ketill, at any rate as regarded succession to the estate, crossed his mind. If only he himself could be sure of living long enough, then he might perhaps make Runa or her child his heir. The child would after all be his own grandchild, with the blood of his race in its veins.

But as he sat, his thoughts and plans faded to mere dreams and aimless desires. The future was too hard for him to face.

Runa sat trying to pray, her lips moving without a sound, to frame the opening sentence of the Lord’s Prayer.

The man she had loved was far away in a foreign land—at that very moment, perhaps, he held another woman in his arms.

“Our Father . . .”

He had sworn that he loved her. Neither had spoken of marriage—she had not spoken of it because she had never doubted him.

“Our Father which art . . .”

He had never written to her—not a line. It was a cruel blow to her to realize that he had never loved her—and yet she bore within her the seed of life he had planted. And her whole future now was ruined and desolate. . . .

“Our father . . .”

But she could not pray. A flood of thoughts streamed into her mind—memories of mild spring evenings in the past and fears for her present position in one confusion. Her brain could not set either prayer or thought into form.

Ørlygur rose and came over to her; he tried to comfort her, but found no words. One thing only he knew: reparation must be made, at whatever cost.

Sera Ketill was far from pleased to learn that his brother

was returning to Iceland on the same boat with himself and his bride. Something told him that it would be to his interest to keep his father and Ormarr apart.

Ketill had come to regard himself as heir to the estate by this time, and already saw himself installed at Borg. He never dreamed that Ormarr's present journey, which he regarded as merely a flying visit, could prove in any way a danger to himself and his plans. Ormarr had told him nothing of the transfer of the business. At the most, thought Ketill, it would be a nuisance.

His elder brother was in many ways much like his father. Both seemed eternally to regard themselves as owing a duty to all and sundry—simply because they happened to have been born in better circumstances than most of those around them. Ketill thought himself sufficiently a man of the world to be able to destroy this conviction; and he was not far from regarding it as a childish weakness on the part of Örlygur and Ormarr. Regard for others, indeed!

Ketill was not hampered severely by trammels of faith or morality. He had gone to a school where the general rule of conduct seemed to be each for himself; his studies at college had brought him among students who for the most part made little attempt to conceal the fact that they made light of their calling. One after another, he had seen them go out into the world as priests, in the service of God, spiritually defective, rotten, and corrupt, to their task of leading others by the right way. And all this had left him with but little respect himself for his mission; he enrolled himself with the rest, as a matter of course.

His latest idea was nothing less than to buy up the whole of Hofsfjordur. To own a whole parish—it would be a position of unique power and authority. Priest and sole landlord of the place. And then he could take over the business now run by Jon Borgari's widow under Örlygur's supervision. It was a dazzling scheme.

He was enraged when he heard that his father had cancelled the debts owing to him by the peasants. Carefully handled, they would have made a splendid weapon. And he puzzled

his brains for some way whereby he might—when his father had gone—render the old chieftain's action null and void.

Ormarr's return now was a serious blow to his plans. He had more than once hinted to Ormarr that Ørlygur was getting strange in his manner and actions of late, and it had been in his mind that afterwards he could break the sad news to his brother that their father had towards the end been not altogether responsible for his actions.

But now Ormarr would see his father for himself, and there was no prospect of carrying out that part of the plan. Moreover, it was likely that Ormarr and Ørlygur, in their talks together, might bring out several little matters not at all to his advantage, and seriously damage his prospects. He must, at all events, try as far as possible to be present whenever the two seemed disposed to talk over things generally. He had, of course, given orders for the vicarage to be set in order ready for his arrival, but he could doubtless stay under his father's roof for a time on his return, without giving cause for comment.

Ormarr's arrival with the newly married couple was altogether unexpected. Ørlygur was greatly moved, and embraced his son with tears in his eyes.

Ormarr was deeply touched when he saw how his father had aged. He thanked the Fate that had led him to throw up his work and come home. Also, it seemed that his coming was well timed; for he was quick to note the strained relations between his father and Ketill, though the reason was not at first apparent.

Ørlygur received his younger son with marked coolness, but spared no pains to make his welcome as cordial as possible to his daughter-in-law.

Ketill's idea of making a stay at Borg to begin with was promptly shattered. Ørlygur had guessed his intention, and soon after the midday meal, went out himself to see that horses were saddled. On re-entering the room, he acquainted Ketill of the fact, and added: "You will want to show your wife over the new home before it gets dark."

The hint was too direct to be disregarded ; there was nothing for it but to go with a good grace.

When the pair had left, Ormarr and his father sat alone in the sitting-room. And now for the first time Ormarr perceived how troubled in mind the old man was. He paced up and down the room, and for some time Ormarr forbore to question him. It was hard for Ørlygur to commence, but at length he pulled himself together, and spoke in a weak and faltering voice.

“Ormarr, you should have been my only son. It would have been better so. I am paying dearly for my disregard of the warning. Had I not been so self-willed, maybe your mother would have been alive now, and your life would have been very different. Not that I’ve anything to reproach you with, no. . . .”

Ormarr grasped his father’s hand, and pressed it. The old man turned his head away, and went on :

“It is hard to see a thing one had treasured with heart and soul brought to ruin ; to die, and leave an inheritance of responsibility behind. Ormarr, do you remember Pall à Seyru’s little girl ?”

“Runa ? Yes, indeed. Why have I not seen her this time ? I hope she is not very seriously ill ?” Ormarr had inquired after her on his return, but had simply been told that she was not well.

Ørlygur hesitated for a moment. Then he said :

“Runa has been betrayed—by your brother.”

Ormarr started as if struck, and his face paled. His father’s hand slipped from his grasp, and the two men sat for a while in silence. When at last they spoke, it was of other things.

“Yes,” said Ørlygur thoughtfully, “there are many things that will trouble me if the estate goes to Ketill. I have an idea that he thinks of collecting the debts I wrote off for the people here some time back, as still due to the estate. The folk do not trust him, and have certainly no love for him. If the place—and the honour of the family—are left to him . . . I could wish them in better hands.”

"But I have come home now, father."

Ørlygur looked questioningly at his son.

"But—you will not be here very long? Your business . . ."

"I have sold it."

"Sold the fleet? To whom?" Ørlygur flung out the question with evident anxiety in his voice, and looked keenly at his son.

"To Jantzen."

"Ah—that is another thing. You can trust him?"

"As I could myself, or you, father."

"I thought so, or you would not have sold to him."

"I had to sell out, because we had succeeded in our aim, and there was no longer any need for me to continue. I could not go on. Once I have mastered a thing, when the element of uncertainty and contest—apart from what is obtainable by all—has gone, then I can work at it no longer."

"Then you will take over the estate here?"

"Yes. That is—or will be—a task for me; something that others could not do as well. You are old now, father, and your last years should be lived in peace. I may be a little strange here, at first, still, I can feel that I have come *home*."

Father and son sat in the growing darkness without thought of needing lights. Each wanted to know all about the other's life during the years since they had last been together. Ormarr also was keenly concerned to learn about matters in the parish, who had died and what newcomers were to be reckoned with; there were a hundred questions to be answered. Ørlygur, on his part, was eager to hear of his son's doings during those years, for Ormarr had said but little in his letters.

"There is nothing to tell," he said now. "I have worked hard—slaved at the work—beyond that, nothing."

"You are yourself again now—or at least recognizable as yourself," said Ørlygur. "Changes there are, of course, but mostly in your looks only. Voice, and eyes, and expression have not changed. I have noticed sometimes you smile just as you used to do—it is very long ago now. They have been

weary years, since your mother and you seemed so far away—sometimes you too seemed as far off as your mother in her grave. But I see you have been true to yourself all the time. And I am glad you have come home. I thank you, Ormarr. And I thank God for sending you back to me.”

It was dark now, but still no lights were lit. The house was silent; nothing heard save when one of the two men spoke.

They talked on, fitfully, springing from one thing to another. But for all their frankness and sincerity, there was evidently something that preyed on both their minds.

At last Ørlygur brought up the matter himself.

“Worst of all is that about poor little Runa.”

Ormarr rose, walked to the window, and stood drumming with his fingers on the panes. Then, as if ashamed of having shown feeling, he returned to his seat.

“Runa? . . . Yes. No one must know what has happened. We cannot have *her* dishonoured. For him I have no pity, except for the sake of his wife. She is a good little soul, father, and we must be kind to her. But Runa . . . father, I know what I must do.”

Ørlygur was silent. A strange stillness seemed to fill the room.

“I suppose you are right,” said Ørlygur at last. “There is not any one else . . . ?”

Ormarr rose. “No, there is no one else,” he said shortly, and he lit the lamp.

Ørlygur took a candlestick with a stump of candle in, lit it, and kissed his son’s forehead.

“Good-night, Ormarr,” he said quietly. “I am going to bed now.”

As he passed Runa’s bed, the light fell on two wakeful, shining eyes. Making sure that none of the others in the room were awake, Ørlygur bent down and kissed her.

“Don’t be afraid, little Runa. Ormarr has something to say to you in the morning.”

Ormarr sat on, staring at the windows, long after his father had gone.

His own calmness surprised him. He felt as if he were playing himself as a pawn on the board of life—and yet he could play—and let himself be played—willingly enough. Neither he nor his father had considered Runa's possible wishes in the matter. Ormarr smiled as the thought struck him.

But, in any case, her honour must be saved.

A drowsy weariness came over him. How empty life was, after all! What had he, himself, got out of it in return for all his labour? His years of work had been for the benefit of others. But was his work of any great importance, after all? There had been a time when he had thought only of fame and pleasure. Then he had seen that there were other things more worth regard. At first he had regarded the domains of love as sacred and inviolable, but after a time had plunged recklessly across the border. And since then he had always regarded himself as one who could never hope to meet with his heart's desire, his ideal. The whole question of love seemed one of but slight importance to him thenceforward. And he had been occupied with other things.

It all came back to him now, as he thought of his brother's relations with his old-time playmate, the fair-haired child whom he had known later as a tall, bright-spirited girl.

And now he was to marry her. She was a woman now—and his brother had betrayed her. It was a thing that had to be, for her honour's sake and that of the family name. His brother's child would be brought up as his. He was to marry, and his wife would bear a child—another's child.

How strangely the threads of life were woven! Well, after all, why not? It mattered little—nothing really mattered. What would the child be like? he wondered. Boy or girl? And what was the mother like? Again, it did not matter much.

Anyhow, this must be the last phase—the final stage of his life. It must end as it had begun—at Borg. Like his forefathers, he was fated to be a link in a chain, rather than an individual.

Only it meant now that all his dreams of something greater and better were at an end.

He glanced up and saw that it was light outside; the moon had come out from behind a hill. Moved by a sudden impulse, he took his hat and coat and went out.

The sky was cloudy, semi-darkness and bright moonlight alternating in quick succession; the earth looked cold and forbidding under a heavy frost, with the streams showing up as dark lines through the white.

Ormarr took a path he knew, leading to Borgara, where as a lad he had guarded the wool by night. Leaning against a rock, he stood, letting thoughts and fancies play through his mind at random. The happenings of the day, the revelations he had heard, seemed more like a dream than any reality.

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Runa lay wakeful long through the night. Ormarr's unexpected return had thrown her into a state of confused emotion. The simultaneous arrival of Ketill seemed but of minor importance, though why this should be so, she could not have told herself.

She remembered Ormarr from his last visit home, and how she had felt drawn to him at the time. He, on the other hand, had not paid much attention to her, and was doubtless unaware of the impression he had made. To her, he was the greatest and best, the most wonderful of men; an ideal, inaccessible, but nevertheless to be worshipped.

Then he had gone away—vanished as suddenly as he had come, to live thenceforward only as a dream in her heart. And she was firmly convinced that he had never given her a thought. In this, as a matter of fact, she was right.

On learning of his arrival now, she had tried in every way to avoid him, to conceal herself from him. All the others might know, but Ormarr—no, that was too cruel. And now—he would learn it soon enough. His father would tell him, and he would know what she was—the very thought of it made her shudder. She was not what she appeared to be; she was nothing. She hated Ketill, and wished herself dead.

The thought of taking her own life had crossed her mind,

but fear restrained her. Now the thought came up again, and when Ørlygur had whispered to her as he passed, whispered a thing she dared not understand, she made up her mind. There was no fear in her heart now, she had taken her decision.

Shortly after Ørlygur had retired, she rose up, dressed herself noiselessly, and crept along the passage towards the room where Ormarr slept. A light showed from beneath the door; evidently he was still awake. With bated breath she passed by, and crept from the house without a sound. She longed to look in through the window, just to see what he looked like—now. But she dared not risk it. She stepped cautiously and quietly until a little way from the house, then suddenly she broke into a run, and made away towards the place she had in mind. . . .

Ormarr saw a woman come rushing down towards the river. His first impulse was to run towards her, but, realizing that she must pass close by where he stood, he remained motionless, waiting.

The woman checked her pace and stood for a moment with hands clasped to her breast. Then she bent down and, taking up one of the sacks that were strewn around, began filling it with stones. She felt its weight, and, apparently satisfied, tied up the mouth. No sound came from her lips.

In a flash Ormarr realized who it was, and what she had in mind. He saw her move down to the water's edge, the sack in her hand. Then, rising, he called to her softly:

“Runa!”

The girl stood still as if paralysed. He walked up to her without a word; he did not look at the sack, but touched it as if by accident with his foot, sending it into the water. Then, taking the girl's arm, he led her quietly back to the house.

He took her to his room, led her to a seat and sat down beside her, taking her hands in his and stroking them tenderly. The girl's breast heaved; she was deadly pale, but she made no sound. So unexpected had been Ormarr's intervention that she had hardly realized as yet what had happened.

Ormarr held her hands in his.

"Poor child, it is hard for you, I know. Life is hard. I have learned something of that myself. Poor child, poor child! But, Runa, you must trust me . . . will you try? I will be kind to you. Perhaps, after all, you may be glad of the child and I as well. For we must marry, you know; it is the only thing to do. But only as a matter of form, of course, to save a scandal. The child will be born in wedlock, and it will be understood to be mine. No one knows anything as yet; we can go abroad at once, and stay away a year or so. It is not what you had wished for, I know, not what you had a right to expect, but—there is no other way now. As far as *he* is concerned it is too late."

Runa burst into tears, and sat weeping silently, with scarcely a movement of her face; but her breast heaved violently, and the tears poured down her cheeks.

"I know, dear child, it is hard for you; you love him, and me you neither know nor care for."

The girl drew back her hands and wiped her eyes.

"I hate him," she said, almost in a whisper. And a moment after, she added passionately, defiantly. "And I never loved him at all."

She threw herself face downwards over the table, sobbing bitterly.

Ormarr left her to herself for a while. Then going over to her, he stroked her hair, and tried to comfort her, as one would with a child. And when she looked up, there was a light in her eyes, of gladness, as when a child meets kindness from one it loves and respects.

Tears rose to Ormarr's eyes; the thought crossed his mind that she might at that moment be wishing the child were his. And a pang of vague longing passed through him, such as he had known at times when life had seemed empty for the lack of one thing.

As if by one accord, the two avoided each other's eyes.

Then resolutely Ormarr threw off his shyness, as if it were a thing to be ashamed of. He went straight to her, and spoke as calmly as he could—though his voice quivered a little.

"Runa, there is nothing else to be done. You must be my wife."

"Yes," she answered. There was nothing of bitterness or regret in her voice. But she fell to crying again.

Then said Ormarr: "You will be mistress of Borg, you know, and that means a big responsibility, and much to look after."

She had stopped crying now, and was evidently listening, though she still hid her face. Ormarr went on:

"I have finished my work abroad now. When we come back from our journey, we shall take over the management of Borg. Father is old, and needs rest. And then it will be for us to see that our child is so brought up that we can leave the place in good hands after us."

Runa sat for a while without speaking; she had stopped crying now. Then she rose, and carefully dried her eyes to leave no sign of weeping, and murmured something about it being time for her to go. And then tears came into her eyes again, and she blushed.

Ormarr had opened the door, but closed it again and came towards her.

"Well," he said, "don't you think we might shake hands and consider it settled? That is, unless you would rather have time to think it over? We could at least promise to give each other the best we can. . . ." Ormarr could hardly speak, so deeply was he moved.

Runa gave him her hand—a warm, trembling hand. He pressed it, and let her go.

When the door had closed behind her, Ormarr began slowly undressing, thinking aloud, as was his wont.

"If life is really only a tiny meaningless flicker, and death the eternal and constant state, if life is only little indifferent momentary things, and death the great and boundless, then why all this complication and suffering? If my soul could perish, could be destroyed by suffering like the smoke of wood consumed by fire, like the scent of a flower shed out into space, like a colour that fades in strong sunlight, then it would surely have become disintegrated long since. Or are

we all figures on a stage? If there were any connecting string between myself and the gods above, I fancy I should make a first-rate marionette."

He put out the light and got into bed.

"It is just like me to try and conceal my thoughts from my innermost self, to breathe a philosophical mist over the windows of my own mind. If I were to be honest now, I should have to confess something different. Be honest for once? And confess! Confess that a new, inexplicable joy had suddenly welled forth within me!

"Just because I have seen the flush of a soul turned towards my own. And here I am already building castles in the air, with golden towers of great anticipation. But, to be honest, I must build here and now, whether I will or not, and trust that the building may stand."

The moonlight shone in over him; he turned his glance towards it and looked up smiling at the sad, wry face, nodded to it, and then turned over on his side and fell asleep.

BOOK II

THE DANISH LADY AT HOF

CHAPTER I

FRU ALMA had come to Iceland knowing nothing of the language of the country. Ketill and his brother had always spoken Danish; it had never occurred to her that all Icelanders might not understand it.

When she came to Borg on her first arrival, and met her father-in-law, who could neither understand her nor speak to her, she realized that this ignorance on her part would make her lonely and isolated, and she asked her husband:

“Why did you not teach me Icelandic, Ketill?”

But Ketill answered curtly. He was in ill-humour on account of the failure of his first plans, and his reception generally.

“Never thought of it,” was all he said.

Alma, whose womanly instinct had told her at once that all was not as it should be among the family, glanced anxiously from one to another of those round her. Then she observed:

“But I can’t talk to any one.”

“You can talk to me.”

Alma was silent. It was the first time her husband had spoken unkindly to her.

Later on, as they went home to Hof, Ketill rode in silence, with never a word to his wife all the way.

“Alma’s heart was full of conflicting emotions. She was sorry that there should be any coolness between herself and her husband; but her conscience at least was clear. And why could he not talk to her; tell her what it was that evidently troubled him? It struck her that he had never really confided in her, save in regard to matters of no account.

Suddenly she realized that they were really strangers. She had never really known him, after all; he had never opened

his heart to her. And the distance between them seemed so tangible that it was hard to realize that they were actually married. Despite the intimacy of their relationship, they were separated by a veil of darkness and uncertainty. And so they were to live, side by side, year after year, bound one to another by a bond that could not be broken,—ay, and by another that would soon be evident,—to live in each other's company through every day. And the thought was so painful to her that she found herself unwilling to contemplate that her children would have to call this man their father.

The change in her feelings, or more properly, her sudden realization of the true state of things, the recognition of her thoughtless rashness in entering upon this marriage, came to her as something overwhelming; she hardly knew herself. All in a moment she was changed; she was no longer the light-hearted, innocent girl, but a creature unknown, with unknown possibilities.

It was done now, and she was helpless. She had given vent to thoughts and feelings which, as her old self, she would never have dreamed of. So unaccustomed was she to act on the dictates of her own feeling and not by custom and tradition, to measure things by her own ideas and not by orthodox, accepted standards, that she felt herself now a dangerous person, a criminal, forced to seek refuge in silence and emptiness from words or thoughts that might lead to disaster.

There was her husband now, riding ahead, and paying no heed to how she managed on the way. Where was the courteous gentleman who had stood by her side at the altar? And she had told herself—and others—that she had found the ideal partner for life! A priest, moreover, a servant of God, set in the forefront of humanity as an example to others!

Little by little she worked herself up to a state of bitter scorn. Once she had let herself go, she knew no bounds.

And she did not spare herself, now that she had once ventured to form her own judgment of things and people, herself included.

Oh, what an irresponsible fool she had been in her self-

deception! Trustful and idealistic—yes, and narrow-minded and unwittingly a hypocrite. A doll, a child, a foolish butterfly thing. . . . Heavens, how little and mean and stupid, wicked and ridiculous, she had been—she and so many others of her kind.

There was her husband, riding ahead . . . yes . . .

A reaction of regret at her impetuosity came over her. It was a dreadful thing not to love and honour him. Oh, if only he would make it easier; turn round and nod to her kindly, or say a friendly word. She would be loving and forgiving at once. Who could say what troubles were burdening him all the time? And perhaps it was only to spare her that he said nothing. Men were strange in that way; they fancied that a woman suffered less in such estrangement if she did not learn the cause of it.

Then—oh, it was incredible! They were at the ford now, and he was riding through the stream without so much as a look behind him. . . . Well, perhaps there was nothing so strange in that, after all; possibly it had not occurred to him that she had never forded a stream on horseback in her life; it was only thoughtlessness on his part.

But all the same it was a hard struggle to keep her mind in any friendly attitude towards him, or to keep back the fears that would rise to her eyes. She bit her lips, and strove to restrain her feelings.

Her horse was already knee deep in the water—and the Hofsa at this part was wide, yet with a fairly strong current.

Alma had never ridden through running water before; at first it seemed to her as if the horse had suddenly flung itself sideways against the stream. Instinctively she leaned over herself, farther and farther, against the stream. Ketill, a couple of lengths in front, looked round just as she was about to fall, turned his horse, and seized her arm just in time.

The roar of the water, and a sense of dizziness in her head, rendered her unconscious for the moment. But the grip on her arm was hard, and a feeling of anger rose in her towards her husband. Again she restrained herself; it was perhaps only his firmness that had saved her; she forgot about his

carelessness in riding ahead of her across the ford. Her kindly feelings were uppermost, and as soon as they had crossed to the farther bank, she turned to him, trying honestly to speak in a friendly tone, and asked:

"What is it, Ketill; what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing—nothing," answered Ketill, and gave his horse a cut with the whip, so that the animal sprang forward a pace.

At that, Alma broke down entirely, and fell to sobbing helplessly; she was weary and desperate, unable to think, or even consciously to feel; she was alone in a great solitude, herself a solitary speck of misery in an endless expanse.

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They reached the vicarage. Alma was now in a state of dull indifference. She had, however, carefully dried the tears from her face, and drawn down her veil.

The vicarage servants, about a score in all, had gathered in front of the house to welcome the new master and his wife. Ketill was abrupt and reserved as hitherto; he shook hands with them all, as was the custom of the country, but his greeting was cold and formal.

Somewhat unwillingly, Alma laid her slight, warm hand in the first hand outstretched towards her; but the evident respect and kindly feeling with which it was taken touched her at once, and she grasped it with sincere feeling. And the ice once broken, she was able to greet each of the simple, silent folk with unfeigned heartiness. She could not understand their stammered words, but her own manner spoke for itself, and one old woman, the last to come forward, was so touched by the natural kindness of the fine lady from foreign parts, that she forgot herself so far as to put one arm around her shoulder and kiss her on the cheek.

Alma felt herself trembling, and could hardly restrain her tears. Leaning on the old woman's arm, she passed into the house.

Ketill gave some brief orders, and the servants dispersed. But even this first encounter had been enough to plant in

the heart of each of them a seed of ill-will towards their master, and affection towards the Danish lady he had brought with him as his wife.

The old woman led Alma into the low-ceilinged sitting-room and left her. Neither could understand the other's speech, and she had judged it best to retire.

Alma sat down on a chair just inside the door, still wearing her riding-habit and veil, and looked round the room. It was painted white, with four heavy beams across the ceiling. The two windows at one end of the room were already hung with heavy winter curtains above the white. The furniture was of polished mahogany. The floor was carpeted, and a heavy old-fashioned stove was built into the centre of one wall. A big upright clock ticked monotonously, with a beat as cold and devoid of feeling as the utterance of a philosopher whom nothing on earth could move. There was a sense of comfort about the general atmosphere of the room, yet it had, as is often the case with rooms antiquesly furnished, a touch of aloofness, forbidding the introduction of any other tone, or at least dominating others by its own.

Close to one of the windows Alma noticed a large writing-table and a bookshelf; that seemed familiar. And suddenly she realized that the room was to be not hers alone, but her husband's also. Probably he had no study of his own in the house. And a feeling of bitterness crept into her heart; the room seemed less inviting now.

She rose, and crossed to the window farthest from the writing-desk, where there stood a small work-table. Here she sat down in an easy-chair, still without taking off her things, and looked out of the window. Outside was a small plot of potatoes and turnips, hedged in with the remains of a rhubarb bed, against the high bank which sheltered the garden on the north. The windows faced south-west, looking on to the bleak, high fjeld beyond the enclosure. Behind the vicarage towered the Hof Mountains, hanging threateningly, as it were, above the place; farther in the distance were

blue-grey peaks and ridges. It was all so strange to her that now, looking at it calmly, it seemed unreal, incredible.

Alma turned cold at heart as she looked. She remembered her first survey of the landscape earlier in the day, from Borg; she had found nothing green in it all save the sea. All the meadows and pastures round the house seemed withered and grey; the autumn green of the fields in Denmark was nowhere to be seen. All things seemed barren and decayed, with a grey pallor, as it were, of something nearing death, that she had seen before only in aged humanity. Here, she perceived, autumn was a reality, and not merely a passing phase to be taken lightly. Most of the houses, small and low, were built of turf and stone together. And the separate buildings of each homestead seemed to creep in close to one another, keeping as close to the ground as possible, like a flock of animals cowering before an approaching storm.

The impression it made on her then, of impending disaster, of something evil lying in wait, had vanished as quickly as it had come; she had not had time to dwell on it. But now it recurred to her mind, and she felt herself surrounded by coldness and enmity on all sides—until she remembered the greetings of the servants, and the old woman who had ushered her in to the house. The kindness they had shown to her, alone and helpless as she was, seemed like a protecting circle round her. And easier in mind for the thought, she fell to pondering how she could best learn their language quickly, that she might at least find some kind words for them in return.

While she was thus engaged, her husband entered.

She glanced at his face; anxious first of all to learn if he were still in the same ill-humour as before. The light was fading, but she could see that his expression was cold and hard, that of a stranger. Her heart beat violently; she sat without a word.

Ketill hardly gave her so much as a glance; he walked up and down the room once or twice, as if in thought, then stood by the window farthest from her, looking out. After a while,

he drew a deep breath, and came towards her. His brow was lined, and his face stern, but there appeared nevertheless to be some attempt at friendliness in his bearing—as if to show that she at least was not the cause of his ill-temper.

“Well here we are, at home!”

“Yes.”

Alma’s heart throbbed painfully, but he did not notice her emotion—only that she had not taken off her riding things.

“Haven’t you got your things off yet?”

“You have not bidden me welcome yet, Ketill.”

“Oh, I forgot. Never mind, don’t worry about that.”

“No, no. . . . Forgotten, did you say? Ketill, I hardly know you again.”

“Whatever do you mean by that? One can’t always be in the best of tempers, I suppose?”

“No, perhaps not. But—it seems a strange homecoming, that’s all.”

Ketill was silent. He had no reply to offer, and the conversation bored him. He was curiously indifferent to Alma’s feeling of well-being or the reverse. What was she, after all? A child, thoughtless, ignorant, like all women—and most men too, for that matter. She was out of sorts just now—never mind, she would have forgotten it by tomorrow. At any rate, he could make it all right again then; perhaps he might feel more in the mood for paying attention to her troubles. Ketill was thinking in this strain when Alma spoke again.

“It is strange that you should be so different now, all at once. It almost seems as if our marriage had separated us rather than brought us together.”

Ketill had no time now to bother about whether there were any truth in this or not: no, the only thing to do was to smile in a superior fashion and not let himself be put out. And he smiled accordingly, the self-satisfied smile of a priest and a model husband, setting aside his bad temper for the moment, and said:

"There, there, little philosopher—let us put off the quarrel till another day."

"Quarrel? Oh, I had never thought to quarrel. I'm only unhappy, that's all."

"Well, don't you think it might be reasonable to imagine that I had some reason for being—well, not in the best of tempers today—what?"

"Yes, indeed, Ketill. But you have told me nothing; I know nothing of what could have upset you."

"Well, hardly. Women don't understand men's troubles as a rule."

"That seems a new sort of thing for you to say."

"Possibly. We've hardly known each other long enough for me to have told you everything I think."

"True, we have not known each other so very long. I only hope we may not find we knew too little of each other."

Ketill laughed; to his mind, the question was not worth taking so seriously.

"Well, you've certainly grown less of a child and more of a woman—more of a married woman—than you were."

But Alma found it utterly impossible to fall in with his tone.

"I am tired, Ketill. I should like to go to bed."

"Already! Well, well, perhaps it's the best thing you could do."

He walked to the door, opened it, and called down the passage: "Kata!"

The old woman who had first shown Alma in, answered his call, and Ketill charged her briefly to show her mistress upstairs; she was unwell, and would go to bed at once.

Old Kata led her mistress to the bedroom above. She could not overcome the awkwardness caused by the impossibility of speech, but did her best to make up for it by kindly looks and gestures.

She would have withdrawn again at once, but Alma held her back, made her sit down on a chair by the bed, and tried to talk to her, repeating little phrases again and again till they were understood. Kata seemed willing enough, and did

her best to understand; she would have liked to explain that she and all the others had already taken to their new mistress, and were anxious to do all they could for her. It was a marvel to Kata that a fine lady could be so natural and sweet and condescending. All that she had seen before of that sort had been proud and stiff and disdainful towards humble folk.

She tried to relate a dream she had had the night before about a burning light washed up by the waves, on the shore just below. Old Kata was a poor enough creature to look at, but by no means poor in spirit. She had her own world of visions and dreams, and was mistress there. And she would not speak to all and sundry of her dreams; but folk knew she had the gift, and could see what she would and learn what she pleased.

Kata was sure that the light she had seen was the *fylgje*, the attendant spirit, of the young Danish lady. Kata always saw a person's *fylgje* before she encountered the person in reality, and she had rarely seen so beautiful a *fylgje* as this. For what could be more beautiful than a burning light? A burning light in the darkness. And she was accustomed also to interpret and say what such things meant. But here she could not. A burning light in the darkness—what could that mean? Something good, something beautiful it must be. And the person it followed must be a good and lovable soul.

.

Later that evening, the servants sat talking things over together before going to bed. They spoke of their Danish mistress, and gathered round old Kata, who, of course, had first claim to speak with authority here.

"Anyway, she's a good heart," said one of the men.

"And not too proud to take humble folks' hand—as she did my very own."

Old Kata let them talk; she could afford to be silent. Her turn would surely come. She had had most to do with their mistress up to now, and, moreover, she was recognized as the wisest head in the place—not excepting any priest. She sat

now with her knitting, considering it beneath her dignity to take notice of all that was said.

Moreover, she had already expressed her opinion, in the most favourable terms, and as the others likewise had nothing but praise to utter, there was no call for her to take further part.

"Anyway, I'm certain she won't be as hard and cruel as the last one was, with her scolding and words," said one of the maids. "What say you, Kata?"

"She's the blessedest light I've met in all my days," answered Kata quietly, and a trifle slowly, as was her way. "There's never an evil thought in her soul, nor a hard word in her mouth. And that's the truth."

CHAPTER II

SERA KETILL went late to bed that night. By ill chance it was Saturday, and he had to have his sermon ready for the morrow.

On this occasion, above all, it behoved him to take some pains with it. It was his first service, and there would be a large and expectant congregation.

Nevertheless, he did not feel at all in the mood for dealing with his text: "Ye cannot serve two masters."

He felt a sudden bitterness of regret that he had ever decided to become a priest. Had he but chosen any other profession—a lawyer, a doctor, even a trader! Then he would have been able at least to avenge his defeats indirectly, by letting others suffer for them. Just think, for instance, of the satisfaction with which he could have taken up the task of passing sentence upon some one or other, instead of pointing out the inadvisability, nay, the impossibility, of serving two masters. He wished he could have altered the text, and held forth, for instance, upon the abomination of desolation, or the Day of Judgment. But it could not be done; the text was of serving two masters, and nothing could alter it. And he had to have a good strong sermon on that text by tomorrow, or his first appearance would be a failure. He was not disposed to risk further defeats after the ill-success of his plans today. He needed the encouragement of a victory, and must take it where it seemed most easily attainable.

He thought of his changed position; all things had turned out badly up to now. His castles in the air; his dreams of power—unlimited power—in the parish, had, he could already perceive, faded into nothing. And suddenly it struck him that he had only to give vent to his own bitterness, directing it into the proper channel, and there was his sermon!

It took time, and it was late before his manuscript was finished. But as he contemplated it, noting with satisfaction the finishing touches, he felt assured that here at least was a masterpiece; he had only to deliver it with forceful and earnest eloquence, and it must have its effect. He had regained his self-control, and was ready to forget all the disappointment of the day in sleep.

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Alma awoke early next morning.

She dressed in haste, and as quietly as possible, anxious not to awaken her husband, and with some difficulty found her way through the passages and out of the house.

She stood for a little outside. It was a quiet autumn day; the air seemed full of a strange peace and solemn calm. Being Sunday, there were none of the people astir, save those busy within doors in stables or kitchen, and of these she saw nothing.

Alma wandered round the place, making a survey of her surroundings. The buildings, with their turf roofs and solid walls of the same material, seemed pleasant enough to the eye, giving a sense of security in their massive solidity. They seemed as firmly rooted and immovable as if Nature and the Lord had planted them in the earth when earth was made.

She looked about for the church, but could see none. The tarred wooden structure yonder, with a turf wall round, could surely not be it—and yet, on closer inspection, she noticed a white cross rising from the roof. With a curious beating of the heart, she hurried across to the gate in the earthen wall. Reaching it, she found that the church stood in the middle of a modest little churchyard. She opened the gate and went in. Most of the graves were simply oblong mounds of earth, only here and there was there a headstone with the usual border round. And there were a few wooden crosses with lettering in black tar.

The church itself was locked. She walked round the outside, and looked in through one of the windows, of which there were three on either side. The interior was painted white. At one end stood the altar, on a small semicircular

eminence, with a low rail round. Next to it were the choir stalls, consisting of a few benches along the walls and some loose ones arranged to allow of passage between. On the right, looking down the nave, was the pulpit, with painted figures of apostles on the panels, evidently older than the church itself. There was a small harmonium, polished and new-looking—the contrast made Alma smile. But she regretted it at once; the feeling of amusement at this primitive lack of taste which installed a brand-new cheap-line harmonium in an old church, disappeared. She felt that God's all-seeing eye was on her as she stood there spying in through a window at His house.

Looking around for somewhere to sit down a little, she noticed that the churchyard wall on one side was low, and went across. On her way she passed a grave on which stood a small pillar of grey granite, the upper part broken off obliquely. She stopped, and half unconsciously read the inscription. Between the Christian name and surname stood the word *skald*. She passed on, wondering in her mind what the little word might mean, but gave it up, and soon forgot it.

Seating herself on the churchyard wall, she let her eyes wander over the country round, noting how the sun shone on the fjord and on the farther side of the valley, leaving a strip of shadow on the fjeld. And a feeling of longing rose in her breast. It was strange to see the sun shining on others, and herself be left in the shadow. It seemed as if there were joy there, beyond—joy in which she had no part, and which saddened her to watch. And it was not only today, not merely the shadow of a passing cloud that barred her from the sunlight; no, there stood the fjeld, the dark and massive, rocky height, that day after day was to steal the sunlight from her life. She felt that there was enmity between them—but a moment later she realized that the dark church and the gloomy fjeld were in harmony; and that God was in and over both.

Strange—ever since she had set foot in this place, she had felt the presence of God distinctly; a blind omnipotence, of merciless mercy—she hardly knew how to define it. God

was not so distant in these surroundings as He had first appeared. The snow-white sides of the fjeld were pure and good to look upon; they might well be the abode of God. The country itself, in all its outlines, shapes, and colours, was so wild and unlike all else that it seemed impossible to regard it as inhabited by human beings only, with their petty trials and pleasures. It was impossible, here, to attach great importance to one's own well-being or the reverse; one felt so pitifully small and weak. Even life and death seemed to lose their distinctive outline,

Alma caught herself thinking—and she smiled at the thought—that she had grown, and grown wiser since her arrival, all in the space of a day and a night. She felt now, to a degree almost beyond reason, that she was but a speck in eternity, only a ripple on the endless sea of time.

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Ketill found his wife deep in thought, seated on the churchyard wall. She had not heard him approaching, and started when he touched her.

With a sudden access of tenderness, he took her in his arms and kissed her.

She made no resistance, though she resented the action inwardly. His strength and the physical charm of the man that had once attracted her were now grown repulsive.

Ketill noted that his wife looked serious. It suited her, and he stroked her hair.

“Sitting here all alone?” he asked.

“I was just looking round the place. One could sit here for years, I think, without getting tired of it. I wish I were a rock—set in a place like this for ever!”

Sera Ketill laughed. “I must say I prefer existence as a human being,” he said.

“But it is lovely here,” Alma went on. “So grand and wonderful—the rocks and the sea and the snow spreading everywhere, and the desolate fields—barrenness and abundance at once. It is like looking at the stars in the sky—emptiness and yet so rich. . . .”

"A bit of good rich pasture land would be more to my taste," objected Ketill teasingly.

"I suppose it would. Really, I think I feel more at home here than you do yourself."

"Well, I'm glad you do not find the country altogether forbidding. Many people do, you know."

"Forbidding? I feel as if I were under a spell. No will of my own, just a thing in the hands of Fate. And I love the feeling that there are great and distant powers that have taken my life into their hands."

"You had better be careful, or you will be growing superstitious—it is a common failing among the people here. They believe in all kinds of spirits, portents, omens, fate, and all that sort of thing. Look at that gravestone there—the one with the granite pillar. A young poet was buried there. Somehow the top of the stone got broken off. And folk lay it to the charge of the powers of darkness—he killed himself, you know."

"Yes. . . . A broken soul beneath a broken stone. . . ."

"I don't think the powers of darkness trouble themselves much about the gravestones in our churchyards."

"A poet, you say? And he killed himself? How—why?"

"Threw himself over the cliff into the sea. You can see the spot—over there. It falls sheer down into the fjord."

Alma looked and shuddered. A white wave broke the surface of the water, and dashed against the cliff.

"But why?"

"Nobody seems to know quite. They say it was something outside the usual causes—not starvation, for instance, or love or weariness of life."

"Nobody knows? And yet he threw himself into the sea? Then it must have been a call from on high. He realized the presence of God, and followed it, into darkness and death."

"Alma, whatever are you talking about!"

"I hardly know myself. The words came into my mouth without a thought. And I feel myself thinking strange things that never entered my head before." And she laughed, a

little nervous laugh. "It is as if the spirit were upon me, and I had to speak so."

At this Ketill suddenly felt called upon to play the priest. Though, as a matter of fact, he was rather impressed by her words.

"Alma, that is blasphemy, you know."

"Not at all." She looked up in surprise. "I simply feel as if the Spirit of God were moving on the face of the waters, and as if I were a piece of dead clay, waiting to be created as a human being."

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By half-past nine, the congregation began to appear, coming up in little groups. Many were on horseback.

Alma was outside the house, and it seemed as if the place had suddenly become alive. Little knots of people came into view here and there, far or near, appearing and disappearing between the contours of the landscape. Nearly all were hurrying.

Reaching the church, they dismounted in groups, as they had come, tethering their horses near by. They were unsaddled, and some were merely hobbled and allowed to wander about at will. The churchgoers then set to tidying themselves before the service: pulling off the long riding hose, brushing dirt and hair from their clothes, unpacking collars or aprons, and fastening bows with careful neatness.

Then, having completed their toilet, they began to move about, exchanging greetings and news, collecting in new formations and changing again. A few spoke noisily, but for the most part they talked in an undertone, with much nodding of heads and brief ejaculations.

Alma was a centre of attraction, though most of the curious ones tried to conceal their interested observation. A few of the principal farmers and their wives, knowing who she must be, came up to greet her, but with some awkwardness, when they found she could not understand their speech. And they withdrew to the company of their fellows.

Ørlygur à Borg came alone.

Alma went up to her father-in-law, who smiled and took

her hand, flushing like a youth, and with that curious kindly smile of his lighting up the furrowed face. He was looking better, she thought, than he had done the day before.

She took his arm, and would have led him into the house, but he shook his head, and nodded in the direction of the church, where the bell was now ringing in. Most of the congregation were already seated, only a few late comers were hastening up. Among them was old Kata. She thought herself unobserved, and waved a coloured kerchief in the air, muttering to herself: "Away, be off with you, cursed creatures; get away, wicked things."

The bystanders imagined she was addressing invisible beings, evil spirits and demons,—the *fylgjer* of those present,—whom she had to drive away to make a passage for herself.

Alma entered the church with Ørlygur, leaning on his arm up the aisle. This was not customary except in the case of bride and bridegroom, but she knew no better. Ørlygur was somewhat embarrassed, but he felt happier than he had done for many a day; not for any consideration would he have withdrawn his arm.

He found her a seat next to his own sitting, but did not take that place himself. As the first layman in the parish he had duties to perform; he led the singing, and Alma noticed that it was the organ that followed his lead, not the reverse. She also remarked that his voice was surprisingly strong and pure for his years.

In the responses, however, he faltered a little; possibly, thought Alma, from nervousness on account of the fact that his son was officiating for the first time. A little after, she noticed a frown on his brow, lines that had not been there before, or at least not so marked. And it crossed her mind that Ørlygur à Borg was not on friendly terms with his son Ketill—there must be some good cause for it. . . .

Already she seemed to have grown to love this old man, with his snow-white hair and beard, and the look of strength and yet of Christian kindness in his face. Her eyes wandered from one to another of those present, old and young.

Many were better dressed than Ørlygur, who wore a suit

of brown homespun material, his jacket buttoned up round the neck, and a pair of soft hide shoes on his feet. Many of the others wore collars and polished boots, yet it was easy to see that this man was the leader—the born master of his fellows, to whom all others must defer. Not that there was anything overbearing in his manner, far from it. He nodded to one and all, and they returned his greeting without servility, but with ungrudging respect as towards a superior whom they esteemed.

Ørlygur sat with bowed head and expressionless features throughout the sermon. But Alma could see that the people generally were carried away. And when the service was at an end, they gathered round Ørlygur and Ketill to offer their congratulations. Ørlygur, however, made no reply to their words of praise, only thanked them briefly. Shortly after, he took leave of Alma, shaking his head in response to her invitation to the house. She saw him go up to Ketill, who was standing in the middle of a group of peasants, and address a few words to him, whereupon both men walked away to where Ørlygur's horse was standing.

“Ketill, I must have a word with you,” said Ørlygur to his son.

And as soon as they were out of earshot of the rest he went on.

“Do not speak; do not dare to say a word! Listen! You are a scoundrel and a rogue. Your sermon was hypocrisy, and inspired by something certainly not divine. You can deceive these poor folk, maybe, but you can no longer deceive me. I cannot imagine what use the Lord has for such a man as you—that He ever let you into His vineyard at all. And I cannot understand what Fate ever led that angel yonder to become your wife. How her beautiful eyes could fail to see through you—’tis more than I can fathom. Her will is for good—and yours for evil. Ay, you may smile! You are a hypocrite—a ne’er-do-well. But you are the priest of this parish, more’s the pity, and married to a good and beautiful

girl—also, you are my son. I can only warn you to be careful. And I have this to tell you: Ormarr is taking over the estate of Borg; he has sold his business. And he is to marry Runa, my adopted daughter; they are going abroad at once. When Ormarr dies, Borg goes to *their* children—you understand me? I would advise you to be good to your wife. Should I hear otherwise, then God have mercy upon you. For her sake I will continue my duties in the church as before, hateful though it is to me to endure the sight of you. For her sake I pray that God will give me strength. Even now I cannot set foot in your house. Make what excuse you please to your wife; let her be spared from knowing the truth; bring her to Borg occasionally yourself. I would not see her suffer for your sins. And now I have spoken my mind.”

Ørlygur à Borg turned on his heel, mounted his horse. and rode off.

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Sera Ketill had endeavoured once or twice to smile during his father's outburst, but it was more for the sake of preserving his self-control that he had tried to consider the matter in a humorous light. As Ørlygur rode away, he stood with bowed head, set teeth, and frowning brow; then with an effort he pulled himself together, striving to regain his normal air of priestly authority.

When, a few minutes later, he encountered Alma, he said: “My father was very busy, and could not come in. He told me to give you his kind regards. Ormarr is leaving tomorrow—going abroad, so they have much to do at Borg.”

“So that is why Ormarr did not come to church?”

“Yes, naturally.”

“But surely he will come and say good-bye?”

“It is hardly likely. He is only going away for a short time, and when he comes back he will live at Borg.”

“It will be nice to have him so near. But what about his business?”

“He has sold it, so my father tells me. As a matter of fact, this voyage is a sort of honeymoon. He is going to

marry Runa, father's adopted daughter, and she is going with him. We did not see her yesterday."

"But it seems strange—not to pay a farewell visit."

Ketill smiled sarcastically. "I should not expect it," he said. "It is not the custom in this country."

CHAPTER III

FOR the next few days Sera Ketill went about with a preoccupied air. He was trying to weigh the situation and settle his plans.

If his father and Ormarr had thought he would give up the struggle without protest, they were mistaken. He would not allow himself to be crushed. If they asked for war, they should have it. True, everything seemed to favour them at present, but on the other hand, the odds absolved him, he considered, from any obligation to be overscrupulous in his choice of weapons. All's fair in love and war.

He remembered, with something like regret, the pleasant spring evenings when he had wandered side by side with Runa, enjoying a brief flirtation. Happy days—with nothing but the pleasure of the moment to consider. He had no longings to plague him, having all that he desired. He imagined himself in love with the shy, dreamy child who trusted herself so unreservedly to him. It had cost him something to leave her, but, nevertheless, something within him told him that he must; that he could not go on enjoying one idle, happy phase, but must move forward to a new and more strenuous one, that promised in return greater rewards for greater strife.

And, once he had left her, Runa had passed from his mind entirely; all that was left of her was a vague memory, the recollection of one of his minor adventures, a careless day of sunshine in his past. He had never thought she would cross his path again; it had never once occurred to him to write to her. He regretted his thoughtlessness now. If he had kept up a kind of correspondence with her, he might have used his influence over the girl to some purpose. Anyhow, it was fortunate that the incident had turned out as it

had. No scandal—not a soul to fear. He could be quite easy on that score, for it was in the interest of the other party that nothing should leak out. And, with a little deft manipulation on his part, the hushing up of the matter might even prove a most useful weapon in his hand. Again, all was fair in love and war.

On the whole, his position was not so bad. He had made a good match, and his wife had considerable expectations in addition to her present fortune. Yes, he would be able to look after himself. Ormarr might take over the estate—for a time. But he who laughs last, laughs best. When all was said and done, his father and brother had not yet got him into their power; he had his congregation, and his position gave him an excellent opportunity to influence public opinion. Meantime, he would take care to win them over by his powers of persuasion generally, and gradually make them his faithful adherents.

The old man had been furious on Sunday; he had probably been far from appreciating his son's talents as a preacher. But he would know how to lash the old man's feelings with his words from the pulpit; he would reach farther and cut deeper than any other had done before. No fanciful theology, but argument backed by chapter and verse from the Scriptures. There could be no question of defence or refutation; it would be pleasant to see Ørlygur à Borg writhing under the interpretations of the Old Testament delivered by his son. Ay, he would show them that a priest was a man to be feared, an enemy not to be lightly challenged.

Sera Ketill was already elated with thoughts of his victory to come. He drew up far-reaching plans, and began at once to con the doctrines of the Church in his mind—as weapons to be used in his campaign against his father and brother.

Alma was left very much to herself; her husband had little time to spare for entertaining her. When he was not busy with his sermons, he was occupied out of doors.

The cattle were brought in for water, and the sheep called down from the mountain pastures where they had grazed

throughout the summer. Their numbers had to be checked, according to the list prepared when they had first gone out, to see if any were missing. Then came the question as to how many should be kept during the winter. The hay in the lofts was measured out in horse-loads; one sheep needed but a single horse-load for the whole winter, this being eked out by the winter grazing grounds, which gave a certain amount of feed each year, on the hillsides or down by the shore. A cow, on the other hand, would need forty horse-loads, whereas a horse could manage with ten. All these and other details had to be considered.

Then came the killing season, and large droves of sheep were sent off, either direct to the slaughter-houses or to the market.

There were repairs to be undertaken, buildings and out-houses to be seen to; altogether, there were many things which claimed Sera Ketill's attention, and often his personal supervision, especially the sale and slaughtering of the stock.

Indoors, too, there was much to be done; supplies of dried, preserved, and pickled provisions were invariably laid in for each winter.

Alma herself had not much to do. When it was fine enough she went for long walks; otherwise, she spent most of her time reading or sewing. Now and again she would go out into the kitchen, and try to talk to the maids. When Kata was at liberty, Alma sought her company, either in the kitchen or in the sitting-room. Kata preferred the former; it seemed to her a mark of favouritism to be invited into the inner rooms. Alma had come to appreciate highly the old woman's straightforward earnestness and her power of maintaining discipline when necessary, and old Kata had no greater wish than to do all in her power for her young mistress. She carried out her duties faithfully, and saw to it that the other servants did the same.

Alma had thus plenty of time to consider her own position. But it was a difficult matter to arrive at any clear conclusion out of the maze of moods and fancies that filled her mind.

At times she even thought of returning home to her people,

but only for a moment. She felt she would never be able to take up the threads of her old life again. And indeed, from a practical point of view, it seemed impossible. What would her husband say to such a step? Moreover, she would probably be having a child before long.

Apart from these considerations, however, she could hardly bring herself to leave the country; it had made a powerful impression on her from the first, and she felt herself strangely under its spell. Here, at least, she could live, even if she had to renounce all idea of any happiness in her domestic life with her husband. If she went away now, she felt that a part of her being would be left behind; to live elsewhere would be spiritless, intolerable.

She bore with resignation the shattering of her dreams of love, and made no attempt to deceive herself with ideas of a future reconciliation. Love, she felt, would play no further part in her life; when she endeavoured to sound her feelings on this point, she found herself coldly indifferent. Her conscience was in no way hurt by her attitude towards her husband; it could not be otherwise, since he on his part seemed to have no longer any pleasure in the possession of her, regarding her merely as a chattel he had acquired.

She even went so far as to imagine that he had never loved her, but only pretended to do so, and had only won her by sheer selfish calculation. In the days of their courtship, such a thought had never entered her mind; but now, disappointment had driven all love away, leaving only a sense of injury.

Chiefly dominant, however, was the sense of indifference; Alma had almost become a fatalist. Sorrows and disappointments were things to be taken as they came, and stacked aside, as a card-player lays aside the tricks he has taken, or a miser packs away his treasures. All unknowingly, she was gradually developing in herself something of the essential character of the country that had so impressed her; so it was that the snow gathered and hung on the mountain-side, ever more and more, until it crashed down in an avalanche, burying houses and men, or sweeping them out to sea. So also in the heart of the volcanoes molten stuff was gathered slowly—to burst

forth one day and spread death and desolation abroad. And human beings might do as they, gathering slowly the force that, suddenly loosed, should change their destinies.

Autumn spread its heavy tones over the land, persistent, yet ever changing.

There were grey, wet days, when all things were obliterated under masses of rain. Then violent storms, when window-frames and houses rattled and shook, and the dust was whirled in huge yellow clouds. Haystacks were caught in the whirlwind, tumbledown cottages demolished; even the strongest men were at times obliged to move on all fours over the hills, to avoid being swept over some precipice. Boats along the shore were crushed like egg-shells; there were sad days for the fisherfolk.

Sometimes the elements seemed to be resting, leaving the weather calm and mild; at other times there would be days of shifting light and shade, of scurrying clouds and sudden hailstorms that left white streaks along the hillsides where they passed.

The days were growing shorter; everywhere the advance of darkness made itself felt, like a mighty bass in the autumnal choir, relieved by the clear treble of the stars and the northern lights.

Alma spent the long evenings at home for the most part, busy with her own thoughts. There was little interchange of words between her and her husband. They seemed separated by a gulf of silence; Ketill, apparently, found nothing distressing in the fact. It was convenient to have a wife who was quiet, and did not bother him. But Alma felt as if they lived in different worlds, with but the slightest link between them.

Sometimes the fact that they were married—and the intimacies which alone declared it—seemed to her so tragically humourous that she had to bite her lips lest she should break out into bitter laughter.

The autumn nights had a depressing effect on her mind,

filling her with a consuming pain—a deep and intolerable longing for some one in whose heart she had a place, though but the merest little corner, where she could feel at rest.

At milking-time, about ten o'clock, she could be sure of finding old Kata in the cowshed. And often she would steal out to her there, watching the old woman at work in the dim light. Old Kata knew that her mistress might be coming, and sent off Kobbi, the old cowman, for a jug, which was filled straight from the udder,—an especial piece of consideration on the part of Kata,—and the three would sit talking together as best they could. The two old folk had already taught their mistress something of the language, enough at any rate for her to understand them, and now and again put in a word herself.

CHAPTER IV

TIME rolled on.

The autumn nights grew longer; the days dwindled to a few hours' feeble light.

Winter was near at hand.

Then came the snow. First one night, when all was still. There it lay next morning, a soft, white sheet spread out under a blue-tinted sky. All the earth seemed silent as in church, at the hour of meditation. And when any sound broke the stillness, its echo seemed to dwell in the ear for longer than usual, dying away slowly, as if loth to depart.

The wind came, levelling the snow to fill the hollows of the ground; then more snow, then rain, and then frost; winter was come in earnest, come to stay. Heavy, murky clouds shed their burden of snow, but passed away again; winter had many aspects and was never one thing for long at a time. Westerly winds flung the snow hither and thither, mountain torrents rushed down on their way to the sea. And then suddenly, in the midst of all this wild confusion, would come calm, clear nights, of ghostly quiet, no sound to be heard save the murmur of the sea, like beating of the wings of time.

And men lived on, under the heavy yoke of winter. It seemed as if the winter itself were ever trying to foist itself upon them, claiming acknowledgment of its presence. It set its mark upon the window-panes, thrust itself at them through the cracks of doors; but they strove to keep it out, thawing the pictures on their windows, bundling the snow from their thresholds with scant ceremony, even with abuse. No wonder that the winter turned spiteful at times, lying in wait for men and leading them astray in storms, luring them to destruction in some concealed ravine where their last

breath could be offered up as a sacrifice upon its altar. It was but reasonable so.

This winter, the Hofsfjordur folk had little time to spare for contemplation of the usual struggle; they took the necessary steps for their protection, but their minds were largely occupied with other matters.

There was the new priest, Sera Ketill, son of the mighty King of Borg—and he gave them food for thought in abundance. From his first sermon, he had made his influence felt, chiefly, perhaps, through his eloquence and the depth of feeling he seemed to display. Then, later, it became evident that there was a certain tendency in his discourses; his arguments pointed towards some conclusion, though what this was could hardly be seen as yet. His masterly treatment of his texts revealed an iron will, that had evidently set itself some great and difficult task.

Sera Ketill revealed himself as a fanatic, stern and merciless in his interpretations and demands. He appeared as an idealist, looking ever toward the goal of perfection, which he seemed to regard as undoubtedly attainable. In his judgments and castigation he was unrelenting as a Jesuit; his doctrine was clear and hard, admitting of no compromise: if the eye offended, pluck it out; if the offending hand were nearer and dearer than all else, there was still no way but one—cut it off and cast it from thee. Thus Sera Ketill taught his flock.

Sunday after Sunday the church was full; week by week Sera Ketill knit more closely the bond between his parishioners and himself. At first they admired him, but it was not long before they came to love him. What had been, was forgotten; he was their priest now. All knew that Ormarr was to inherit Borg after his father, and it was not difficult to forgive Ketill for having, in earlier days, cherished other hopes. Plainly he had himself been the first to mortify the flesh, and put away his own worldly desires. And who should call him to account for any youthful indiscretions? After all, perhaps he had not been serious in his reputed intention of discontinuing the benign and considerate rule that had been a tradition of the Borg family towards those round them. His sternness

in matters spiritual, on the other hand, was unimpeachable; it showed his earnest desire for the welfare of their souls, and those who followed his precepts were happy in so doing, even though it cost them something to break with the old easy-going ways. Conscience needed to be kept awake and sensitive. And it was not altogether unpleasant to come to church and be rated and stormed at for all backslidings; one sat listening with beating heart, subject to an emotion which Sera Ketill's predecessor had certainly never had power to call forth. The wearisome homilies of the old days, full of spiritless and superficial argument, had made it hard for them to keep decorously awake. But now, it was a different atmosphere altogether. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart." Also, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But hence it followed that one should tolerate nothing in one's neighbour that would not be tolerated in oneself. "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God," ay, jealous even towards His children. Wherefore it behoved them to adopt a similar attitude towards those around them. Wheresoever anything became apparent which was not in the spirit of God, let them rise up and denounce it; if they suffered any among them to look with scorn, or even with indifference, upon the Holy Word, then they themselves were guilty. And for such sinners there was nothing but everlasting damnation; the Scriptures had declared it plainly.

Sera Ketill's doctrine admitted but two alternatives—either heaven or hell.

And he did not confine his teachings to the pulpit. His eyes were everywhere, and as often as he discovered anything among his flock that was not according to his teaching, he was ready with word and deed. And he brooked no resistance—he spoke in the name of the Lord. Illegitimate relationships that had gone on for years were ordered to be legalized; it was not an uncommon thing for an old couple who had never been properly married to appear in church for the ceremony with their grown-up children as witnesses. A fever of zeal spread from the vicarage throughout the parish. True, there were occasional murmurings from those who were

called upon to mend their ways, but even they felt the power of this new influence in their hearts. And little by little the flock was led into the paths of righteousness.

First and foremost, Sera Ketill demanded of his congregation that they should attend regularly for worship in God's House, where, by hearing of the Word, their hearts might be opened to receive the Lord. Anything beyond a single Sunday's absence called forth a visit and a reproof for neglect. Thus it was not long before Sera Ketill became the unquestioned leader of the parish, acknowledged by all.

Among the poorer folk he gained great popularity by foregoing his right of grazing on their land; here was an example near to hand of the self-denial he preached. Such a thing had hardly been heard of before. Plainly, Sera Ketill was one who himself lived up to his principles.

His judgment was taken as infallible, any decision on his part was to them as if inspired by the Almighty. And week by week they grew more and more dependent upon him; every Sunday he whittled away some portion of the spiritual independence they had hitherto enjoyed. Yet they hardly felt it as a loss; they were made to feel that it was pleasing to God that they should do as they were bidden.

Sera Ketill's doctrine bore the outward semblance of hallowed certainty and divine infallibility. But there was something vague about it still, something that had not yet been declared outright. A sense of expectancy, half-unconscious, perhaps, hung over the parish. Whither was Sera Ketill leading them? What was it that was coming?

Ketill himself realized well enough that his scope of operations was limited; he could only carry matters to a certain point. Like a skilful general, he carefully estimated the fighting strength at his disposal, and never permitted himself to indulge in any over-sanguine imaginings as to how far his people would follow him when it came to the pinch. Above all things, he must not lose his head; must not act prematurely. His objective was clear, but it could only be reached by patience. Given but time enough, the ripened fruit would fall at his feet. Meantime, he must foster the growing zeal

among his flock; in time, they would be ready for any outburst of fanaticism. Not too quickly—no. But his time would surely come.

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Ørlygur à Borg attended service regularly; Sunday after Sunday he listened to the wild outpourings of his son. And sorrow and wonder grew in his heart.

Ketill strove to maintain his appearance of sincerity towards his father, but he knew that the old man saw through the mask.

Ørlygur, on his part, for all that he had declared that Ketill could no longer deceive him, found it hard to account for his son's zeal. If he were not serious, then why . . . what was he aiming at? But again and again he felt an instinctive certainty that his son's preaching was not inspired by any divine influence.

And apart from the religious aspect, Ørlygur was sorely troubled to see the people thus easily led. He knew his folk, and was himself a leader of no common power; he could not but wonder now, whither they were being led. Also, he knew only too well the cold reaction that often follows undue excitement.

Many a long winter night the King of Borg tossed restlessly in bed, uttering many a prayer to God—the only Being whose superiority he acknowledged. He was weighed down by a sense of impending disaster—there was trouble coming, and coming swiftly nearer.

Ketill was the leading source of his uneasiness; again and again he asked himself if he could not somehow step in and avert the threatening catastrophe. But he racked his brains in vain to find any way in which he could act as things were. What was there for him to oppose? He could not take action against his son's enthusiasm in the cause of religion and piety? Heaven forbid! Was he to endeavour to minimize the devotion of the people to their God? Even though Ketill's heart were cold, and his zeal but a sham, who could say but that he might yet be an instrument in the hand of the Lord—a creature inspired as to his deeds, though not in

spirit? Ørlygur à Borg could not raise his hand against Heaven.

For all this, his suspicions never abated, but rather increased, as he watched the growing hold of his son upon the parish. Was it not a masked attack upon the supremacy of Borg? His son was trying to usurp his place as chieftain. He called to mind the story of David and Absalom, and David's bitter lament for the death of his son. And he could not free himself from the thought that Heaven must be working out some plan with Ketill, the prodigal; at times, also, it seemed that something evil were lying in wait. And, in such moments, the old man longed to take his son, his child, in his arms, and weep over him, despite all the wrong he had suffered at his hands. Ørlygur made no attempt to disguise from himself the baseness of Ketill's conduct, but he fancied it might be the will of God moving in some mysterious way. His heart was torn by the meanness and hypocrisy of his son; he felt himself wounded to the death. And yet all the time his heart was bursting with a desire to forgive.

Nevertheless, the same disgust and aversion filled him every time they met. He felt he must step in and put a stop to all this underhand scheming and working; Ketill was a creeping, venomous thing, to be crushed underfoot ere it had wrought irreparable harm.

For the first time in his life Ørlygur felt uncertain of himself, wavering as to his proper course of action. He doubted his right to lead; doubted even if he had been right up to now in stewardship under God of all that was His.

He searched his conscience, yet he could find no evil there. Yet what if his judgment of himself were at fault, blinded by pride and self-deceit? How should a man judge of himself?—God alone could judge.

The brave old warrior was stricken and weakened now; his own flesh and blood had wounded him, and, in face of it, doubt and uncertainty gripped his soul.

The winter wore on.

Each day brought the foreboding of disaster more and more

prominently to Ørlygur's mind; each night increased the restless tension of his heart.

Then late in March came a letter from Ormarr, then in Italy.

The news was encouraging; Runa had borne a child, a son, some weeks before, and both were well. Ormarr and his wife were happy together; Runa appeared to have forgotten her past trouble, and Ormarr did his best not to revive any unpleasant memory. He himself was well and happy, though longing at times for his home at Borg; he was anxious to return, and tend and comfort his father in the last years of his life.

They would be coming back as early as could be managed, reaching Iceland in June. The child was to be regarded as newly born; it could hardly be difficult to conceal the exact truth as to its age. And as Ørlygur knew, they had been married in Denmark the previous autumn. Finally, Ormarr bade his father be of good cheer, and wished to be sincerely remembered to his sister-in-law, Alma.

Ørlygur found the letter encouraging, yet at the same time there was something in it that saddened him. He was glad to have the support of his son's youth and strength in his loneliness, and his heart went out to the boy in welcome. Here, at last, he would have some one he could trust, some one in whom he could confide. But at the same time, there were fears in his mind as to what would come when Ormarr returned, and his anxiety increased as the time for his homecoming grew nearer.

Gloomy dreams haunted his sleep—a thing he had never known before. What it all meant was beyond him, but somehow, all seemed to centre round the idea of approaching death. At the same time, he realized with dread that there might be worse in store for him than death—something more terrible than what was after all but a natural end.

CHAPTER V

THE winter was a hard time for Fru Alma.

Never, surely, had a tender, womanly heart been so overwhelmed with loneliness and doubt, conflicting feelings and bewildering thoughts, or borne it all with greater fortitude and patience.

A snow-white lily snatched from the sunny spring and thrust away into a gloomy loft. And what is the withering of a lily to the agonies of a human heart? Here was a human creature, plucked from a careless butterfly existence under a cloudless sky of youth, and transplanted to a land of grim solemnity and earnest—the home of Fate, where dreams and omens and forebodings reigned; who could endure it and not suffer?

Alma's soul developed in adversity, but it was an unnatural growth—the growth of herbage in the shade, outwardly luxuriant, no more. Such growths, once brought into the light of the sun, must wither and shrink, to rise no more.

Hardest of all, perhaps, was the monotony of her life. Despite the changing weather, lengthening days, intercourse with people around her as she picked up a little more of the language, despite the busy Sundays, it was a sadly uneventful existence, and there seemed no hope of relief in the future. The coming years loomed out as burdens to be borne in due course, days of drab wakefulness, with restless nights of evil dreams; the healing rest that night should bring was but a mirage.

When the loneliness became unbearable she would seek the company of old Kata, or of the other servants. And her kindness to them all was soon known far and wide. Were any in trouble, be sure Fru Alma would not pass them by;

her generous sympathy was recognized by all. "The Danish Lady at Hof," they called her, and looked to her as one to whom any appeal for help should naturally be made, as to a patron saint, or the Son of God Himself. And there was no irreverence in the comparison.

The vicarage was constantly besieged by beggars and vagabonds; Sera Ketill, scenting personal advantage to himself in his wife's reputation for charity, encouraged her in the work. He thanked her—but his thanks were insincere and superficial, and Alma was not deceived. She and old Kata were the only ones who saw through him, each in her own way. The two women never spoke of him together; he was the one theme upon which they never exchanged confidences. Alma could not speak ill of her husband to any one, and it was not old Kata's way to make ill worse. Kata knew exactly what went on at the vicarage, and she was the only one who did. Ørlygur was only partially aware of the true state of affairs between Ketill and his wife.

Kata, who herself had never been wife nor mistress to any man, was more outspoken with Fru Alma than she had ever been with any other soul. She found in her a creature pure and undefiled as herself, a nature trustful and unsuspecting, with that high confidence that gives the greatest worth, beyond what ordinary sense can perceive. And Kata tested her in many ways before venturing to speak freely; but Alma passed every ordeal triumphantly, unaware that she was being tried. Chief of all was absolute, voluntary silence, speaking of a matter to none until one knew that speech was but as speaking to oneself. Good wine should not be poured into untried vessels.

It is hard to say whether old Kata's confidences were to Alma's good or the reverse. In any case, it was a relief to her to talk with the old woman, and at first she paid but little heed to what she heard. There were strange themes which she would never have dreamed of discussing with any one, and when alone, she gave them but little thought.

Gradually, however, they became more insistent, and laid firm hold on her mind.

True, she never saw nor heard "things," as old Kata claimed to do; she was not given to seeing visions, and certainly had no claim to the power of second sight. But she had strange dreams which Kata, when in the mood, would interpret in such wise that Alma became thoroughly convinced of the old woman's powers.

They had strange talks together at times.

"Why is it, do you think, Kata," Alma might ask, "that there is always more suffering than joy in life?"

"I doubt but it's all because they crucified the Son of God."

"But don't you think there's many a human being must have suffered as much as He did? Others have been crucified, you know; and then death on the cross is not the worst kind of torture that could be imagined."

"Nay, there's many a heavy cross to be borne, that's true. But God is God, and that's another thing."

Or Fru Alma would start another theme, asking Kata's views as to whether sufferings of human beings were confined to this world, or if there were perhaps still greater pains and trouble to come.

Old Kata opined that each and every one would receive punishment or reward according to their doings in this world.

"It seems to me," said Alma quietly, "that we are so bound by inherited weakness and sin that however much evil we may do, we cannot fairly be judged beyond our life on earth."

"There's a deal in that, maybe," answered Kata. "And there's many a poor sinner not rightly answerable for all they've done. But God is God."

One day, when a number of dead bodies from a wreck had been washed ashore in the fjord, Alma said:

"Sometimes I can't help thinking that mankind, for all the limitation of our powers, could manage some things more justly at least than Providence seems to do."

"Never speak like that," said old Kata warningly.

"Think of the Scriptures. 'Tis God's finger guiding all."

"Oh, I know it's a blessed thing to have faith in time of trouble. And as long as it's only oneself . . . But when something dreadful happens to others, and there seems no sense nor reason for it all, then one can't help asking, why, what is it all for? Surely one might think that a heavenly providence would be kind, and work for our good."

"Ay, 'tis strange to think, no doubt," answered Kata. "And there's times when it's hard to answer such things. But God is God."

This last expression was a constant formula in Kata's mouth, which to herself at least seemed to dispose of the most difficult problem.

Alma ventured to put a direct question.

"Have you never felt yourself, sometime, that you didn't really want to say 'God's will be done'?"

"Now you're asking me something," said Kata, "and something I'd not answer to any but yourself."

The spinning-wheel stopped, and Kata paused; not a word was uttered for some moments. At last the old woman went on:

"Once there was a poor man and a young woman. She was not rich, neither, but they two were fond of each other, and gave each other promise. They would wait till they could buy a little farm; it might take years, but they would wait. You know the hills over yonder they call the Dark Mountains. Well, the young man, he went up there to serve with a farmer who offered him good wages. And the girl, she stayed behind, and never saw him all that summer. But she had her ring to look at, and hope. In the autumn, he came down over the mountains to see her. And there came a snowstorm on the way, and he was frozen to death in the mountains. . . ."

Old Kata's voice had changed; its tone brought tears to Alma's eyes, and though the speaker herself shed never a tear, it was a little time before she could go on.

"Yes. 'Twas a hard blow to my faith at the time, and I was all doubt in my heart. But later on that same year

I learned the truth. He was going to marry the daughter of the farmer he'd been working with, and only came down to ask me to give back the ring and give me mine again. And then I said 'God's will be done.' 'Twas providence clear enough. 'Tis not for us mortals to fathom the ways of God, and there's much that seems mysterious, ay, and hard and unjust. But God is God. And we're but weak things in His hand, without understanding. But for all that we can make our hearts a shining light, and show the way to wanderers that's lost the way.'"

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When Alma knew she was to give birth to a child, she gave way entirely, and pent-up tears burst forth.

"Oh, how could it, how could it ever come like this?" she moaned.

She was to bring forth a child that should carry the nature of its father or its mother—to what degree she could not say. And the prospect of a child she felt she could not love filled her with horror, the curse of a joyless motherhood. If only God in His mercy had made her barren; had spared her the anguish of bringing another life into this world of suffering and misery.

She wept herself by degrees into a calmer state, and a sense of pity and self-reproach grew up in her—pity for the new little being to come, and self-reproach that she herself was so weak.

Surely it was sinful to look forward without thankfulness to motherhood, a sin against the child unborn.

And yet—how could she ever be glad?

Life was a void to her; she had no desire in life but to cease living. Listlessly she saw the days go by, the burden of her sorrow ever increasing.

But those around her paid little heed; they had seen so many young mothers who seemed to think themselves laden with all the trouble of all the world.

Örlygur à Borg noticed her condition, and saw, too, that she took no pleasure in the prospect. His heart was touched at the thought, and his tenderness towards her increased.

Often on Sundays he would arrive some time before the service, in order to see her, and if he could, console her a little.

They went to church together, the old man and the young woman; Alma still sat in her old place beside his. And she was grateful for his kindness and friendliness; he seemed to her the most lovable man she had ever known.

One Sunday, just before church, Ketill happened to return to the house, and found his father's overcoat hanging in the hall. The lining was outward, and the corner of an envelope showed in the pocket.

Ketill glanced round, listened, and seized the letter, slipped into a room close by and closed the door behind him.

Hurriedly he read the message through. It was Ormarr's letter telling of the birth of Runa's child.

Ketill's hands trembled, and his face flushed. With a nervous laugh he thrust the letter into his pocket. Then, as by an afterthought, he took it out again, stood for a moment irresolute, and making sure he was not observed, put it back in the coat from which he had taken it.

He went back to join his father and Alma, in the sitting-room, trying hard to appear unmoved. But he felt he could not quite control himself, and began fumbling among some papers on the writing-table. He was still thus occupied when the bell rang for the last time. His wife and Ørlygur would have waited for him, but he bade them go on, saying he would follow immediately.

Ketill waited till their steps had died away, then hurried out to the hall; he knew he was now alone in the house. He took down the coat, and let it fall to the ground, where it might seem to have slipped from the peg. Then he took the letter from the envelope, and laid it unfolded by the coat, as if it had fallen out.

This done, he hurried across to the church. On the way he stopped, felt in his pocket, and beckoning to a lad near, whispered:

"I left my pocket-book on the writing-table in my room. Run in and fetch it for me."

The boy ran off to obey, and passing through the hall noticed

the coat lying on the floor. He stopped to pick it up, and caught sight of the letter. He glanced through it, hardly knowing what he was doing, and finally left everything as he had found it.

When he reached the church with the pocket-book, he was evidently ill at ease; those who remarked it put it down to embarrassment at attracting attention.

Sera Ketill's sermon was not so effective today as usual. Possibly his delivery was in part responsible. The priest seemed curiously absent; once or twice he even came to a standstill, and had to cast about for words.

It was the custom for none to leave the church till the priest and his family had left. Sera Ketill seemed in a remarkable hurry today. He strode across to the house at once, and quickly.

Coat and letter lay where he had left them, but had evidently been moved. Ketill smiled. He picked up the letter, slipped it into the envelope, and put it back in the pocket. He had barely finished when Ørlygur and Alma entered.

Ørlygur had noticed nothing, but Alma thought it strange to find her husband there in the hall, after he had made such haste to leave the church, doing something with his father's coat.

Her heart beat fast, and she turned to Ørlygur.

"Another time, father, when you hang your overcoat up like that, be sure there is nothing in the pockets."

As she spoke, hardly realizing what she had said, at first, the consciousness of her own suspicions of her husband came to her suddenly, and she flushed.

Ørlygur laughed, and answered:

"I don't think there is anything to be afraid of."

And he felt in his pockets. "Nothing here but a letter from Ormarr, and any one's welcome to read that."

He spoke lightly, but a moment afterwards, recollecting the contents, he turned pale. Alma noticed it, but tried to appear unconcerned.

When Ørlygur had gone, she remained standing, deep in thought.

It dawned upon her that there must be some connection between her husband's evident nervousness and Ørlygur's sudden start. What it could be she was unable to imagine.

Outwardly calm, she rejoined her husband.

"Your father showed me a letter he had just received from Ormarr."

"Did he *show* it to you?"

Ketill sprang up suddenly, and came towards her, but she appeared not to notice, and went on:

"Ormarr and his wife are getting on nicely. They are in Naples, and expect to be home early in June."

"Did you read the letter?" asked Ketill, with a careless air.

"No. Ørlygur told me what was in it."

Alma was watching her husband's face, and could not fail to mark the smile with which he greeted her last remark. Evidently, he had got hold of the letter himself somehow, and found in it something that Ørlygur would not willingly have known.

With bowed head, she left the room, and went to her bedroom, threw herself on the bed, and burst into tears.

Her husband was a thief—a priest, and a thief.

What a cruel burden was this Heaven had laid upon her. What would this man's child be? Oh that the Lord would take it before ever it woke to life!

Alma wept long and bitterly, falling at last into a heavy sleep. It lasted but a little while, however, and she awoke in high fever.

She was put to bed, and a doctor sent for. But before he could reach her, the trouble was over—Alma had given her child to the world—stillborn.

When Alma came to herself, she saw her husband bending over the little body, which they would not allow her to see. Ketill's face showed neither tears nor sorrow.

And she thought to herself: I shall die now. And it will be laid in the earth by my side, with never a kindly look from any human being in this world.

With an effort she managed to raise herself on her elbow

and glance down into the cradle where the little body lay. It was all uncovered, on a white sheet, so very small and grey, with little white finger-nails. The sight was like a hot steel in her heart. And with a cry she fell back, unconscious.

For several days Alma lay between life and death, and when at last the crisis was passed, she looked up to find old Kata by her side.

The old woman smiled encouragingly, but would not let her speak.

"Lie still, my dear; the worst is over now."

A day or two later, when Alma was well enough to sit up in bed a little, she asked:

"How long have I been lying here, Kata?"

"This is the tenth day."

"Have I been ill so long? And who has been watching besides you?"

"Nay, I'd have none but myself for that. I've slept a little now and again."

Alma grasped the old woman's wrinkled hand.

"How ever could you, Kata! And how can I ever thank you?"

"No need to try, my dear. 'Tis enough that you're getting well again."

"Have I—did I talk in my sleep at all?"

"Nay, nothing to worry about. Said this and that, maybe, but I paid no heed."

Kata busied herself about the room, avoiding Alma's eyes. "'Tis no use listening to feverish talk," she added.

During the long days that followed, while Alma was in bed, Kata told her fairy stories about kings and princes, with some idea of diverting her thoughts. And Alma could not but smile at the old woman's curious ideas as to the life of royalty; she did not, however, attempt to correct her impressions.

But once, in a pause, Alma broke in suddenly:

"Poor little mite—lying out there in the cold."

She had learned of the burial of her child some time before.
And she fell to crying softly at the thought.
Old Kata came to the bedside and stroked her hand.
“All’s in God’s hand,” she said. “And all for the best.”

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Alma rose from her bed after six weeks' illness, she was but a shadow of her former self. Her face was pale, with a yellow tinge, and her figure wasted to a degree painful to see. She was hardly more than a skeleton. Her dark eyes seemed larger, and glowed with a strange, hard light, such as is seen in the still-open eyes of one frozen to death. Her brown hair no longer stood in a luxuriant cluster round her head; much of it had fallen out, leaving hardly enough to cover the scalp and make a pitiful little knot at the back.

She had seen but little of her husband during her illness. Twice daily he had paid her a brief, formal visit; but only a few words were exchanged between them, and neither found any pleasure in seeing the other. He slept in a different part of the house, and they avoided each other as far as possible.

Ketill could not help noticing that his wife shunned him, but, occupied as he was with his own affairs, it affected him hardly at all.

Alma went about the house quietly, as she had always done, with a smile and a kindly word for all. But though none seemed to notice any change in her manner, her greetings were less heartily felt than before. Her heart was dead within her, and something was straining, straining to an intolerable tension, until it seemed impossible to last. Something must happen soon.

She often went out to the little mound where her child lay buried, and would stand for hours looking down at it. Strange, to have a part of oneself lying there under the frozen earth and yet to go about oneself with the warm blood pulsing in one's veins. It seemed unreal, yet it was reality. Life seemed to have changed altogether.

She was no longer glad that the child had not lived. There

had been a time when she had hoped for that very thing, but when her wish was realized, came pangs of conscience that destroyed her relief at its fulfilment. She no longer thought of what her life might have been had the child lived; she forgot that she had ever feared its birth; she had no feeling now but sorrow for its death, and remorse that she had wished for it.

Often old Kata would come to the churchyard to fetch her, gently reproaching her for staying there so long.

"'Tis no good to let all the sad thoughts stay in your mind. There's life to be lived; you must not go wandering off among the dead so."

And Alma would answer with a listless smile. One day she asked:

"Do you think, Kata, that there really is any life in the world?"

"Ay, indeed, there is. And if the Lord takes one joy from us, surely He will give something else in its place."

"I am not complaining," Alma replied. "I have never complained. But I have seen heavy crosses laid on weak shoulders."

"They that seem weak can often bear the heaviest burden. 'Tis a sorrowful world, but, after all, 'tis only a moment in eternity. And maybe we're only here to be tried in the fire, with trouble and affliction, and the ones that suffer most are those God loves the best. As if He was taking special pains with them, so they could be sooner ready to come to Him."

One day, as Alma and Kata were standing in the churchyard, two ravens flew by. They flew over the church, and old Kata eyed them anxiously, making the sign of the cross.

Then, in a trembling voice, she said:

"They flew over the church. 'Tis a sign that some one'll be called away before long." And murmuring so that Alma could scarcely hear, she added: "If it be Thy will, O Lord, I should be taken, then Thy will be done!"

But to herself she thought: "If it should be the young mistress that's called, then Heaven be praised. I am old and hard, I can wear on for a few years more, but the burden's

over-heavy on her; if the Lord would take her in His mercy . . . God's will be done."

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During the period of Alma's illness, a certain amount of unrest had made itself apparent in the parish.

First of all, there were rumours abroad. No one could say where they had started, or how; it was impossible to trace anything more than the inevitable "So-and-so said so-and-so." But the rumours were of a startling character, and it was highly desirable to find out whether they originated from a reliable source or not.

Briefly, the matter was this: it was whispered that Ormarr's wife had given birth to her child as far back as the beginning of March.

And people made their calculations. The marriage had taken place at the beginning of September the previous year. That made the birth a great deal earlier than it should have been. And yet the child was reported to be strong and well, by no means as if born before its time.

It was mysterious. The good folk searched their memories; they could recall nothing unseemly in Runa's behaviour as they had known her; far from it. The marriage had been rather sudden, true, but they had found nothing very extraordinary in that. The girl had been waiting for Ormarr, no doubt; no one had ever heard any other man's name coupled with hers. It was looked on as a pretty example of a maiden's patient waiting for her chosen lover, and Runa had risen in the general esteem thereby. But now—there were those who began to consider whether they might not have been over-hasty in their conclusions.

It looked as if there were something more behind it. And it was not pleasant to find that one had been deceived.

Nothing had leaked out as to Sera Ketill's little affair with his foster-sister some months earlier, and no one now thought for a moment of connecting him in any way with the business.

But who could be the father?

Folk racked their brains to find one. Some had their own idea, but it would have required a bold spirit to give it utter-

ance. The name of Ørlygur à Borg rose to the minds of many. He was the only man with whom Runa had been on intimate terms, and for whom she was known to have cherished any affection. That it should have led to such a result none had ever dreamt—who could have believed it?

But there it was. Live and learn—the lesson in this case being a warning against misplaced confidence.

Old Ørlygur had played his part well, and had been trusted farther than he should. No, there was no trusting any these days.

But why had he not married the girl himself?

'Twas simple enough—it was too late, and it would not do to sully the good repute of the family. He would never have survived the reproach had his wife been prematurely confined, and for him to marry a young wife at all—a mere child—was hardly suited to his dignity. So he had taken this way out of it. Sent the girl out of the country with his son, giving them strict orders to remain away long enough to guard against any doubt as to the child being theirs.

He had sacrificed his son, that was all.

Originally, it had been intended that Sera Ketill should inherit the estate. Every one was aware of that. And then one day comes Ormarr—on a visit only—and before you had time to turn round, he had sold his business and got married. It was sudden, to say the least.

And folk went farther.

As far as they knew, Sera Ketill's marriage had come rather as a surprise to his father. Ah, the old fox! He had reckoned, no doubt, on getting his younger son to take over the paternity together with the estate. Then, by the wildest piece of luck, when Ketill upsets his plans by coming home married already, Ormarr makes all right again by coming back himself.

Ay, the Devil was kind to his own!

It was not long before the parish had put two and two together, and realized that Sera Ketill must have been aware of the whole thing from the first.

Here was the thought that inspired his preaching! Plain

to see now the aim of all this Christian zeal. 'Twas the preparation for a struggle that he had known was bound to come; they had been watching it all the winter, never dreaming what lay behind.

And now it was beginning to get exciting. What did Sera Ketill intend to do? Would he break with his family openly? If so, how would it be done?

The church was filled as never before; the listeners carefully analysed the discourse from the pulpit, seeking some clue that fitted in with their ideas, some hint as to what was coming. But they learned nothing.

Sera Ketill, on his part, saw that his plan had succeeded. He could mark the growth of the seed in the faces of his flock from Sunday to Sunday. And deliberately he made his allusions vaguer and more general; now that all would make the proper application of whatever he said, there was no need for himself to deliver any direct attack.

It was a drama, played Sunday after Sunday in the church between father and son—and the onlookers were thrilled with a sense of some terrible end approaching.

Parochial disputes were nothing new, but up to now the people of Borg had always stood united on one side or the other, and their side had invariably won. But this was different; this was civil war—a house divided against itself. And it meant a battle the like of which had never been known in the records of the place.

The only drawback was that there seemed no possibility of doubt as to how it must end—unless some new development occurred meanwhile. Not only had Sera Ketill right on his side, but the Almighty was with him. And, moreover, he had taken the precaution to enlist the entire congregation under his banner.

Altogether, it would need something like a miracle to get that old fox Örlygur out of the trap. No use for him to gnaw off a pinioned leg or brush—he was gripped round the middle, and there was no escape.

The thought of this great idol's fall was a thing to make

one shudder; even though he were to fall by his own misdeeds, one could hardly help pitying him.

After all, Ørlygur à Borg had always been their friend. None had ever been so ready to help, so open-handed, as he. . . . But he had always been a proud sort, Ørlygur à Borg, and pride goeth before a fall.

It was rather a conflict between a mortal and the Higher Powers—and they were not so presumptuous as to think of taking any part themselves. He would have to manage by himself—even if it meant ruin and disgrace in the end. However they might feel towards Ørlygur, the general benefactor, they were not disposed to take up arms against the Lord Himself for his sake.

And what said Sera Ketill so insistently: “If thy hand offend thee, cut it off. . . .” Ay, even if that hand were a brother, a near kinsman. . . .

Ay, Sera Ketill knew how to choose his words.

And if he did not venture now to take his father’s part, but stood up and opposed him at whatever cost, it was surely because he realized that God’s commandments must come before all else.

The spirit of hypocrisy made its triumphal progress through the parish.

It was characteristic of the fanatical intolerance which reigned that Ørlygur’s innumerable good deeds were forgotten in the storm of righteous indignation that rose against him. Folk great and small set themselves up in judgment upon their old chieftain and found it easy to discover some selfish motive behind every kindly and generous act of his in the past. Those who owed him most were sternest in their condemnation, and, in default of actual proof, were not afraid of altering facts to support their case. And they quieted conscience by the thought that even if all were not exactly as they put it, there was still evidence enough against Ørlygur to satisfy any reasonable mind. A little touch of colour one way or another made no difference.

The people had chosen; Ørlygur was already worsted and down. Certain of the result, they had declared for the win-

ning side—a fine example of the unstable character of humanity, a weathercock moved by every puff of wind.

Ketill was only waiting for the return of his brother and sister-in-law.

He felt a slight nervousness in the anticipation, though he felt confident in his own mind as to the result of the blow he was prepared to deliver. His plan was complete in all details, all preliminary steps had been taken: he had but to wait for the decisive moment to strike.

But the waiting was monotonous. He had nothing more to do, and his mind in idleness was plagued by distressing thoughts.

If only he had some one to share things with, a companion after his own heart. He was realizing now what it was to be lonely. He even sought the company of his wife, but soon observed that she shunned him as far as possible.

The gulf of silence between them had become almost impassable, and he read enmity and suspicion in her glance.

He had never meant to be unkind to her. Maybe he had been a little neglectful at times—but she ought surely to have realized herself how busy he was, and how hard it was for him to find any time for little attentions.

He had time enough now, and would have been glad to make up for the past, if only by way of finding some comfort himself in his loneliness. His mind was suffering under a growing burden of isolation.

In the daytime he could generally find something to do, but the evenings were long, and the nights often unbearable. He could not sleep, and his nerves soon began to feel the effect of insufficient rest; he had to struggle, too, against haunting thoughts that left him almost physically exhausted.

Sometimes he even considered whether it might not be better to give up the whole scheme. But after all the pains he had taken to prepare it—no, he could not give up now. If he stayed his hand, all would be lost.

His wife seemed lost to him. She was coldly reserved, and utterly unresponsive towards his advances. And his con-

science troubled him. He could almost see himself, at times, with her eyes; hear how his own words rang false in her ears. He was a cheat—and what was worse, he had been found out.

Even if he gave up his plans now, it would not help him. He could never win her back again, of that he was sure.

With his father, too, it was equally hopeless. Ørlygur would never trust him again, whatever he might do; and it was not to Ketill's taste to humble himself to no avail.

No! If he gave up now, he would be utterly alone thenceforward. The people would desert him, for his preaching would no longer have any definite aim; his doctrine would lack its dominant purpose. He would be alone, forsaken by all, without a friend among his flock, his kin, or even in himself; alienated even from his God. A creature to be despised, or pitied; a thing of no account, unworthy either of hatred or affection. Intolerable!

No; if he were to be alone, he would at least have power. If he could not win the trust and affection of his people, he would at least command their obedience and outward respect. No one should have the right to accuse him of weakness.

Such were his conflicting thoughts as the days went on. Ketill was thoroughly wearied of inaction; he longed for the moment when he could act, as a child longs for its birthday. Again and again he pictured to himself the events of that day, conjuring up visions of his triumph; his one desire now was for it to come, and make an end of the waiting.

Also, he began to feel less sure of himself; to fear lest at the critical moment his nerve might fail him.

Once he had declared himself, however, there could be no question of withdrawal; all doubt and wavering would disappear; there he would stand, erect and strong, the victor in a struggle that he had vowed to win or die.

He was not blind to the danger of any weakness on his own part; irresolution would be fatal. But once he could take the decisive step, leaving himself no possibility of retreat, all would be well.

Victory was certain—for he was fighting without mercy, as injustice ever does.

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Alma went about in the same dull, listless state as before. She seemed to be living in a world apart from all that went on around her.

She noticed her husband's restlessness, and that he seemed to be trying to approach her. But she put it down to his weakness and lack of society—a need for companionship of any sort. And as a result, her antipathy increased. She was good enough—in default of all else! But at other times he cared nothing for her. It was not for her sake, not for herself, he sought her. Ketill never realized how his neglect had isolated her in a prison of solitude.

It was impossible to speak to him about the state of things between them; he would only gloss it over with an utter disregard of the truth. And any open insincerity and falsehood on his part would bring matters to a climax; she would be unable to restrain her feelings. What would happen exactly, she did not know; she did not venture to consider the possibility. It seemed impossible that she could ever survive such a revelation.

And yet she had a painful intuition that it would come, and that she would survive it. It was horrible to think that she must go on living after that. Were she but certain that it would kill her, she would gladly do her best to bring matters to a head instead of avoiding and dreading it.

But for the present the wheels of time seemed to have stopped; life was at a standstill.

Even the solitude she sought in her wanderings about the country seemed dreadful to her now. Ice and snow, ice and snow—the outlook was so bleak and desolate that it brought her mind to the verge of insanity.

Her head ached intensely as she looked out over the snow-covered waste; her brain seemed on the point of bursting, she felt herself fighting to retain her mental balance. Once she gave way there would be no recovery.

She would find a dark corner somewhere, and sit down

with her head in her hands, rocking to and fro. Snow and barren waste—the sight of it worked on her till she dared not face it.

Then came the sunshine of spring, and she could go out once more. The snow was still there, but there were breaks in its monotonous expanse. And day by day she watched it disappear.

Then at last one day she heard the roar of the stream as it broke through the ice of its winter bondage. She hurried out to look.

The ice had been carried out into the fjord, and lay there, blue and green, rocking gently on the water. Later in the day it lost its freshness, dulled by the sand and mud carried down by the torrent. Streams were pouring everywhere from the heights above, forming small pools here and there where the water spread.

And gradually the earth rose up out of its covering of snow.

The landscape was dark and bare, relieved here and there by white specks—the ptarmigan had not yet changed their winter plumage.

Then the green of spring began to put forth, and birds of passage arrived. The air grew milder, and the song of birds was heard; there was a scent of growth abroad, a promise of harvests to come.

Early blossoms peeped out, braving the frosts with cheerful smiles. Time went on, and the light nights came, when the evening brought but a veil over the day, that was drawn aside again at dawn, when the bright sun rose, passing from a ruddy glow to a fullness of dazzling rays. Butterflies lived their little lives, and sank to earth, to pass through the cycle of nature before they came again. The lambs of last year were mothers now themselves, wise in the vicissitudes of life and saddened by experience.

But the horses, even the older ones, forgot for a moment their mere material needs, and galloped madly about under the influence of the joy-filled air.

Cattle let loose for the first time from their confinement

behaved in most undignified fashion; even the astonished calves followed suit and joined in the romp with their elders. Good-natured mothers pretended to let themselves be outdone by their month-old offspring, until some youngster grew overbold, and had to be reminded by what was fitting. Great days, these, for a young calf, a time to play at being a grown-up bull, and making ferocious charges against all and sundry.

All the light-heartedness of spring about her brought at times a smile to Alma's saddened face. But it was a smile of pity rather than of pleasure. All these young creatures, this life new to the world, had not yet tasted the bitterness of existence upon earth.

So she lived through the spring with the winter of life in her heart, that nothing could melt away once it had set in. No springtide for her, no budding and bloom.

She longed only for peace—in forgetfulness or death.

CHAPTER VII

ØRLYGUR A BORG was heavy at heart this spring. He marked the covert whispering abroad, and it chilled him. But no one was anxious to be the first to tell him of the rumours that had spread, and he remained in ignorance of their essential theme. Yet he could not fail to see that there was something in the air—something that concerned himself.

The expression of men's faces had changed. Ørlygur found himself regarded with curious glances—sometimes a look of wondering speculation, at times a look of something like scorn. If he came unexpectedly upon a group, they would cease their talking suddenly, or talk with such eagerness of indifferent matters that it was clear they had changed the subject on his arrival. They had been speaking of him—or at any rate of something he was not to know of.

At first he paid little heed to it all. What did he care for their gossip? He had always held himself apart and above all idle talk. Realities, matters of actual moment, were the only things that interested him. Let them wag their tongues if they pleased; say what they would of one another, good or ill. It was always the same in the end—they answered to the hand with the surest touch, not to the mere possessor of a gift of speech.

As days went on, their glances became more and more ill-disposed and evident; the crowd seemed to increase in boldness as its numbers grew. Ørlygur felt himself gradually surrounded; even at Borg itself there was an air of restraint apparent. His own people no longer met his gaze frankly, no longer laughed heartily at his jests; his orders even were no longer received and obeyed with the same willing alacrity as before. If any task called for special effort, there was no

longer the same eager haste to help. It seemed rather as if he were being left to struggle by himself, an object of curiosity as to how he would manage alone. He could see, too, that he was being watched, as if all around him were trying to read his thoughts, and with no friendly eye.

Day by day it grew harder to bear. Ørlygur tried to get at what was in their minds, insinuating opportunities for them to speak out, but without avail. They could not—or would not—perceive his invitations to tell him frankly what was amiss.

He sought out his best friends in the parish, those whom he had befriended most. He called, not as with any evident object, but casually, leaving it to them to speak of what they evidently knew. But all to no purpose. It had not been the way of those whom Ørlygur had helped to cringe and fawn before him; they had acknowledged his assistance as between man and man. But now they met him with fluent insincerity, plainly trying to conceal the true state of the case. Outwardly, they were humble and full of deference and gratitude; but he could see their hearts were ice towards him.

There was hardly a soul in the parish who was not indebted to him in some way. But now that he stood in need of a friendly hand, their selfishness was revealed. Not one had the courage to speak out.

Then came the third of May—the date when farm hands and servants enter or leave their service.

Ørlygur was out and about betimes, looking to some lambs that had just arrived. It was dinner-time before he came back to the house. As he came up, he noticed that there were no men to be seen outside, though some of the ewes were in birth-throes and needing help. He attended to the most pressing cases himself, and then hurried up to the house.

Here a further surprise awaited him. All the hands, and the girls belonging to the house, stood with their boxes ready packed.

At the door he met the headman, dressed in his Sunday

best and carrying a box. The man flushed a deep red at sight of his master, but tried to appear unconcerned.

Ørlygur had come up with the intention of sending out the first man he found to attend to the sheep. Now, he gave no orders, but asked instead:

"Are you leaving, then?"

"Ye—es," stammered the man, evidently ill at ease.

"If you are not satisfied, why have you not told me before, instead of going off like this without a word in advance?"

"You never asked me to stay," was the sullen reply.

"You have stayed on of your own accord now for twenty-two years, since I took you in as a child."

This was undeniable. The man murmured something about having found another place.

"Where?"

"With Jonas à Myri."

"Good. You can tell him from me that if he should be in need of hay again, as he was last winter, he can come to me as he did then. And now—you may go to the devil!"

Ørlygur turned on his heel and went indoors. In the passage he met one of the girls, dressed in her best.

"Are you going too?"

"You did not ask me to stay."

A plot, thought the old man, and turned from her without a word.

All the farm hands were dressed and ready to leave, gathered together in a group. A silence fell on them as he approached.

One by one he asked them: "Are you leaving?" And always the same answer: "You did not ask me to stay."

Ørlygur found difficulty in restraining his feelings. He was deeply attached to his people, most of whom had been in his service for many years. They had always got on well together; the hands at Borg had better wages than they could have obtained elsewhere. Some of them he had engaged when no one else would take them, and they would have been without support had it not been for his help.

And now they were deserting him. Not one of them had been man enough to declare his intention beforehand, and give time for finding help elsewhere.

Ørlygur spoke with studied harshness, fearing to betray what he really felt.

"Get you gone, then, every man of you, and the sooner the better."

It struck him that he had not seen old Ossa, who had served him for fifty years, and had been like a second mother to his children. He found her in the kitchen, preparing his meal.

"Are you not leaving too?" he asked bitterly.

"I'm too old to go about the country seeking work," said she. Her voice seemed richer and softer than usual as she spoke.

"If it is only that, I could have lent you a horse," returned Ørlygur, with a note of sarcasm in his voice.

"Nay, I've no wish to be leaving Borg. 'Twill not be of my own choosing if I should. And maybe I can be some use a bit yet. As long as I've but my keep and needn't be a burden."

There was a slight pause.

"Ossa, what is it? Why are they leaving the place?" Ørlygur asked, with some constraint.

"Master's the best judge of that, I take it."

"But—they say it's because I haven't asked them to stay on from last hiring. You know I've never asked them; as long as I thought they were satisfied, I took it they would stay."

"Didn't they say about leaving before, then?"

"You know that as well as I do."

"Well, then, Master can surely stop them; they've no right to go if you order them to stay."

"I'm too old to beg favours. And I've no mind to call in the law. You won't tell me, then, what it's all about?"

"If you don't know, 'twould not help you to be told."

"Well, well, I'll not try to make you speak against your will. But I thank you for staying on."

"I'll have your dinner ready directly. You'll need it this day."

"Never mind the dinner. Put on a shawl and come and give me a hand with the sheep. They are lambing all over the place, and none to help them."

And Ørlygur strode out.

A lamb was bleating pitifully at the back of the house. He hurried over to the spot, and found the headman already there. The man looked up as he approached. Ørlygur strode forward, his face white.

"You are no longer in my service," he said. "And I do not want your help." And with a blow he struck the fellow to the ground, and went on, paying no further heed to him.

Ørlygur à Borg was left with none to help him save old Ossa.

The sheep alone were more than he could manage; hundreds of them, and in the height of the lambing season. Scores of the young lambs perished daily, for lack of care. Ørlygur and Ossa worked all day and far into the night, doing all they could, but despite their efforts, many of the ewes died in giving birth, or strayed and were drowned or bogged; many of the lambs starved within reach of the udders they could not find. And it was impossible to milk the burdened beasts; many were soon suffering from lack of relief.

There were the cows to be seen to as well; Ørlygur and Ossa were so exhausted when at last they ceased work for the night that neither could do more than sink down in a chair for a few hours' rest. They spoke only briefly, of necessary things, and ate their food on the way to and from their work.

On the following Sunday, Ørlygur asked of those he met at church if they knew of any hands to be had.

It seemed that there were none available anywhere.

And now he felt that they were rejoicing inwardly at his misfortunes. All were against him, he felt certain,

but their opposition was so veiled that there was nothing he could take hold of or challenge.

Patience was the only thing. Ørlygur waited.

It could not be long, he felt, before something leaked out as to what lay at the root of it all. Some accidental hint, a word let drop, might give him a chance to take the matter up. And if he could but find out who was the leader responsible for it all, it should go hard with him.

He suspected Ketill, but could not understand how he could have such power in the parish already as to bring about such a change in the general attitude of the people.

As to his own practical difficulties—he might perhaps get hands from farther off, but he could not be away from the place himself, and there was no one he could send. Nothing for it, then, but to wait patiently for Ormarr's return.

Ørlygur shook his head sadly as he realized his helplessness. Truly, he was getting old.

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The vessel was nearly due now.

Ørlygur kept a close watch on the fjord, and held three horses in readiness for the moment when the ship rounded the point.

If only it would come! He shook his head; he had a feeling that there was but a little time left him now to live.

And he dreaded lest perhaps the ship should not come, or something have prevented Ormarr from making the voyage. He spoke to old Ossa about the weather; no, surely it could not send a fine vessel to the bottom.

Ørlygur's hands trembled incessantly; he was visibly aged, and his voice quavered when he spoke of his own affairs.

Old Ossa was deeply concerned, but strove to hide her sympathy; Ørlygur was not pleased to find himself looked on as a helpless creature, and was apt to turn on her impatiently when he suspected her of overmuch anxiety on his behalf. He would not be looked after like a child. If she ventured to dry his socks at the fire, instead of

hanging them to air in the ordinary way, he would keep his wet ones on. And when she tried to substitute new mittens for his old and tattered ones, he gave up wearing mittens at all.

"Getting old I may be," he grumbled, "but I'm not an old woman yet."

Then at last one day the ship hove in sight round the point.

Ørlygur hurried about, active as a boy, saddled his horses, forgot all his troubles, and astonished old Ossa by humming, all unconsciously, a fragment of a song, that he kept repeating over and over again.

And as soon as he was ready, off he rode to fetch his son home.

Sera Ketill had likewise been awaiting the arrival of the vessel with impatience, and had horses ready.

As soon as he saw it had arrived, he hurried to his wife.

"Ormarr and his wife have arrived—the ship is just coming in. Get ready as quickly as you can. We must go down to the quay and bid them welcome."

Alma looked at him in surprise; something in his manner filled her with vague anxiety.

She put on her riding things—her habit was sadly too big for her now, but, after all, what did it matter? And Ketill and his wife set off for the trading station, reaching there just after Ørlygur himself.

Ormarr and Runa had already come ashore, and the party were about to set off for Borg when Ketill and Alma arrived on the scene. All three tried to conceal their astonishment: they had not expected Ketill.

He greeted them with outward calm, and they tried, for Alma's sake, to appear as if there were nothing but goodwill between them. But all three found it difficult to meet his glance. And Ketill smiled, as if with pleasure at the meeting, but in reality with malicious satisfaction at the evident impression his presence made. It was a tribute to his power. It would not be easy to get rid of him now.

Ørlygur was trembling, and had the greatest difficulty in controlling himself. Trouble was imminent now; of that he was certain. And he puzzled his brain to find the reason of Ketill's appearance there—what had he to gain by it?

Ormarr took the child, and helped his wife into the saddle. He was very pale, and glanced covertly at Runa.

Alma came up to him.

"It is long since we met," she said. And, noticing his pallor, she asked anxiously if he were "unwell."

"It is nothing—I felt a little strange for the moment," he said.

Ormarr, on his part, noted how changed Alma was, how ill and distressed. He was about to question her, but checked himself; best not, perhaps, to ask anything at all just now.

Alma read his intention, and understood that he wished to spare her. She felt she must hide the real cause, and gave only the more direct reason for her evident ill-health.

"I too have had a child since we last met," she said; and added after a pause, "and lost it."

Tears rose to her eyes. And just at that moment Ketill came up.

"What—crying?" he said, putting his arm round her. Alma shivered at his touch.

Ketill lifted the coverings from the child's face and looked at it. "So this is the little heir," he said jestingly. "We must have a look."

Alma also glanced at the child.

"Congratulations, Runa," said Alma, grasping her sister-in-law's hand. "And Ormarr"—turning to him—"and you too, dear father-in-law. 'Tis a bonny child they have brought you home. May it bring luck to the house!"

"Ay, we need something to bring luck to the house," said Ørlygur bitterly.

Alma looked at him, surprised at his tone.

"Oh—you mean you still can't get hands for the farm work?"

Ørlygur saw that she asked in all innocence.

"No, my dear," he answered. "And I am getting old. When the little lad here has grown a bit, I may do as a playmate for him, but little more. But we ought to be getting home."

All five rode off together. Not a word was spoken until they reached the cross-road where Ketill and his wife turned off to take the short path to Hof.

The three continued on their way in silence.

Ørlygur was glad that the meeting had been got over; sooner or later Runa would have had to meet Ketill, and it was well that it was done. He rode up beside her.

"You managed splendidly," he said. "I have never seen a woman so brave and strong."

Runa made no answer, but Ørlygur read her silence as expressing thanks.

Some way farther on she rode up to him again; he understood that she had something particular to say. She rode at his side for a little distance without speaking, then, leaning towards him, she said in a low voice:

"The past is forgotten."

And they rode on in silence. But, despite her words, Ørlygur was not quite at his ease.

Later, when they arrived at Borg, and he saw how Ormarr helped his wife tenderly from her horse, and kissed her, the tears rose to his eyes, and he thanked God that these two, united in misfortune, seemed now, at least, to be living happily together in love.

Old Ossa came out to meet them, and Ørlygur turned to his son.

"The only one that is left," he said, pointing to Ossa. "There are no more servants at Borg."

"What do you mean?" queried Ormarr.

"It means that I have become such a hard master in my old age that I can neither keep old servants in my house nor get new to come."

Later on he told Ormarr how the servants and farm hands had left with one accord, and how those he had befriended among his neighbours round had turned from him

in his need. He said nothing, however, of his suspicions with regard to Ketill.

Ormarr thought for a moment, then turned to his father suddenly.

"There must be something behind all this," he said.

Ørlygur nodded; he too was clear as to that, but what was at the bottom of it all, he could not say.

Ormarr seemed anxious to pass over the matter lightly for the present. "We must be able to get hands from somewhere," he said easily. "And if our neighbours can do without us, I dare say we can manage without them."

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Sera Ketill and his wife rode on for some distance without speaking. Alma had an idea that Ketill wished to confide in her about something, but was at a loss how to begin.

She remembered how she had ridden that way with her husband once before: she had wept then, because he left her to ride alone. Now, the mere idea that he wished to speak to her made her shudder.

They came to the ford, and Ketill drew up close beside his wife, lest she should fall dizzy in crossing. He told her to close her eyes and hold on firmly, which she did. They crossed without difficulty. Alma could hear that the water no longer plashed about the horses' feet. But she still kept her eyes closed.

She could feel that her husband was still at her side. At length he spoke. His voice was unsteady, as if he found it hard to speak at all.

"I want to speak to you about something," he said.

Alma opened her eyes and glanced at him timidly. But Ketill was looking fixedly at his horse's mane as he went on:

"It is an unpleasant matter, and I'm afraid it will distress you somewhat. But it must be faced. And when the time comes I am sure you will agree I have done rightly."

He paused for a moment, and then went on:

"You saw the child?"

He waited, as if for an answer, but Alma made no reply.

"Did it not strike you as being extremely well-developed for a child newly born? It is supposed to have been born on the way up."

Alma looked at him in astonishment.

"Do you mean that the child is not theirs?"

"The child is Runa's. But Ormarr is not the father," Ketill replied. "It was born in March. And Ormarr was not in Iceland the previous spring."

Alma felt suddenly dizzy; she felt as if she must burst into tears, but sat still, outwardly calm. Something told her that though there might be something of truth in this, there was yet falsehood and mischief behind.

Bitter words rose to her lips; it was as if her husband were making her an accomplice in a deed worthy of Judas. But she dared not give vent to her feelings, and only said:

"Well, and if so, it is no concern of ours."

"It concerns us—as being of the family—and it concerns me, as a priest."

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"You have not heard all as yet. You do not know what people are saying throughout the parish—that the father of the child is—*Órlygur* himself!"

"It is a lie!"

Alma was quivering with rage; she had never been so near to losing her self-control.

"I do not say it is true. Until it is proved, we must hope for the best. But you will no doubt agree with me that the matter calls for the strictest investigation. Ormarr and his father have treated the affair with great secrecy—that looks bad, to begin with. Did you not notice last year how Runa was kept out of the way when we were there? And can't you see now why it was? Has it never struck you that her marriage was arranged with extraordinary haste? The whole thing was settled and done in a couple of days. It is a very awkward business indeed for father; the entire parish is against

him. All his workpeople left the place this spring, and he has been there all alone, with but one old woman, until now."

"Why did they leave him?"

"Probably because they knew what was said about him, and believed it true. Very likely they knew of some little incident that proved it. And after that, of course, they would not wish to have anything more to do with him."

Alma was at a loss what to reply. She had a keen desire to defend Ørlygur, for she fully believed he was innocent. But her brain was in a whirl, and the one thing uppermost at the moment was an intense hatred of her husband. But she would not give it rein. She was helpless, and suffering bitterly.

"What do you think yourself?" she asked at last, in a low voice.

"I do not allow myself to *think*. But I have determined to have the matter cleared up. That is all."

CHAPTER VIII

SUNDAY came. A glorious spring day with a bright blue cloudless sky and the air a-quiver with heat; a day of smiles without a shadow, breathing peace to all mankind.

Coming out into the sunshine on such a day, free from the cares and toil of everyday life, the heart seemed filled with a natural desire to give thanks and praise to God for the blessing of life.

But on this Sunday, there were few in all Hofsfjordur whose minds were bent on praising the Lord. Folk hastened to the service, but their thoughts were not with God. This day, the first Sunday after Ormarr Ørlygsson's homecoming, was a day of mark; something, all knew, was about to happen. And all repaired to the church to see. Even tiny children were brought thither; no one was willing to stay at home minding children today.

Sera Ketill was up and about before any of his people at Hof. He moved about restlessly outside the house, avoiding the grass, which was still thickly drenched with dew.

Again and again he glanced over in the direction of Borg. A thin bluish column of smoke could be seen rising straight up above the chimneys of his old home. And involuntarily he found in it something like a symbol of peace. There was something of a covenant in the ray of smoke that rose as it were from some sacrifice acceptable to the Lord.

How was this day to end? Sera Ketill asked himself the question, and wondered who would be coming to church from Borg that day.

Ørlygur and Ormarr moved about in silence, each bent upon his own tasks. There was much to be done; they had made no attempt as yet to secure new hands. It had been agreed that Ørlygur should go to church, the others

remaining at home. Had it not been for his duties there, Ørlygur himself would rather have stayed away.

Early that morning he had fetched in Sleipnir, his saddle-horse, from the fields, and stabled it without fodder to be ready for the road. He let another animal into the box to keep it company, and the pair remained there during the morning, relieving the tedium of their confinement by licking each other.

At last it was time to start. Ørlygur had saddled his horse, but delayed moving off, finding this thing and that to attend to, as if loth to leave the place. Now and again he stopped still, looking out over the country round; from all quarters he could see his fellow-parishioners come riding; all moving towards Hof as the centre of attraction. He noticed, too, that the enclosure round the vicarage was already dark with the crowd of those who had come early.

Finally, realizing that he had no time to spare if he wished to arrive in time, he stepped off resolutely. Then he turned and stopped.

Ormarr was in the courtyard, teaching a new-born lamb to suck. He had been an adept at the work in his younger days, but had forgotten his deftness now, and was fumbling awkwardly.

Ørlygur went straight up to him.

"I think you had better come with me, after all," he said. "I feel—I feel lonely today, Ormarr. Never mind the lamb, it will manage till we come back."

Ormarr looked up. There was something strange about his father's manner today, something he had not noticed before. He rose up without a word, saddled a horse, and a few minutes later father and son set out.

Where the road was good, they gave their horses rein. But Ormarr noticed that, despite the pace, his father was constantly turning to look back at Borg. A new fancy of his, he thought.

There was a stretch of difficult going just ahead; on reaching it, they slackened speed, and rode on side by side at

a walk. Suddenly, and without preamble, Ørlygur said: "I had a strange dream last night. Curiously distinct it was too. I was standing on the hill outside"—he nodded towards Borg—"and a funeral came along the road—this very way—towards the house. A great procession, the biggest I had even seen. And the strange thing about it was that it was coming from the church towards Borg—instead of the opposite way."

He paused for a moment, and continued:

"And that was not all. I was quite sure that it was my own corpse the people were following. And yet I stood there on the hill myself, looking on. If it means anything at all, I suppose it should be taken by contraries—to say that I am to be buried alone, without a soul to follow me to the grave."

They reached the level road as he ceased speaking, and Ørlygur at once galloped on ahead; Ormarr did not overtake him till they had reached the vicarage. Neither spoke.

There was a numerous attendance of people. But it was noticeable that they did not talk together, but busied themselves tidying up after the ride with nervous care. There was none of the customary laughter and easy conversation, all seemed curiously silent. Neighbours did not move to greet one another and shake hands; and none entered the church. All waited, a silent crowd, with their minds at the highest pitch of sinister anticipation.

For the second time the church bell called to the worshippers to enter. But no one moved.

At sight of Ørlygur and his son riding up, the crowd remained impassive, merely staring at the new arrivals as they approached. But they watched them closely, with occasional side-glances at others, who appeared to be watching likewise.

As Ørlygur rode up, he divined at once that no one had as yet entered the church; that all were waiting for himself and his son. They were watching them, too. One glance showed him the situation, and his anger rose suddenly. Usually, he dismounted outside the fence. But now, he

galloped straight across the enclosure, up to the wall of the churchyard, Ormarr following at his heels. The crowd had to give way hastily to avoid being trampled down. Still there was no murmur, only the same watching glances from all. And all could see that the master of Borg was in no gentle mood today.

Suddenly the gathering moved with one accord towards the church and poured in. The bell called for the third time—a strange, solitary sound in the quiet air.

Ørlygur and Ormarr secured their horses and went straight into the church. They were the last to enter, save for old Kata, who hobbled along, waving her coloured kerchief in the air to ward off invisible ghosts and evil things.

Ørlygur read the opening prayer, and the service proceeded as usual, until Sera Ketill ascended into the pulpit.

Ørlygur was in his usual seat in the choir. Alma sat at his side. Ormarr had found a place in the nave, just in front of the organ.

When Sera Ketill appeared in the pulpit, a dead silence filled the church, as if all had ceased to breathe. For a moment the priest stood silent, with a thoughtful mien. Then he spoke—a little unsteadily at first, and fumbling with his fingers at the notes before him. But soon he gained power, and spoke out strongly and in a clear, resonant voice. His hands clutched the edge of the pulpit with such force that the knuckles showed white.

“Brethren in Christ,” he began, “before proceeding to interpret the text for today, I have a painful duty to perform—a painful duty indeed. Let me therefore fortify myself by supplication. I ask you all to say with me the Lord’s Prayer:

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.”

Sera Ketill wiped his brow.

"Yes: Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. And we will serve Thee only. Grant us strength that no earthly ties may keep us from Thee and Thy way. That our duty to Thee may ever be set before all else; that we may willingly take up our cross and bear it in patience as did Thy well-beloved Son."

Sera Ketill paused a moment, and then continued:

"Brethren in Christ, we all know how the Son of God cleansed the Temple at Jerusalem. Today a like duty is laid upon us, the meanest of His servants. To the Almighty, this poor house of prayer is no less sacred than the great Temple; it is the House of the Lord, and no evil must be suffered to dwell therein. And those who have given offence to God cannot be suffered to enter His House until they have begged of Him forgiveness for their sins, kneeling before him with a humble and a contrite heart.

"There is here in our midst an old man who is a cause of offence among this congregation, together with his son, the sharer of his sin.

"The son took to wife a woman out of his father's house. And the woman has given birth to a child that cannot be the offspring of her husband. Whose, then, is the child? It is said that the old man is the father. I have seen the child, and I cannot but believe that it must have been born earlier than is said. Indeed, I am certain of this. And my wife has seen the child, and can testify to the same. The woman, then, has borne a child in sin. But who is the father?

"Until this matter is made clear, until the parentage of this child is established according to the laws of the Church, we cannot tolerate among us those from whom this offence is come. We cannot suffer them to worship God under the same roof.

"And now, Ørlygur à Borg, and you, Ormarr Ørlygsson, I call on you, in the name of God, to leave this holy place. Amen."

Alma leaned over towards Ørlygur and grasped his arm. From the commencement of her husband's speech she had

divined his intention, and now in a moment she realized what had been vague to her before.

Ørlygur sat motionless throughout his son's denunciation, but his brow was firmly knit, and a strange light shone in his eyes.

As Ketill finished, Ormarr rose to leave the church. Passing by the pulpit, he looked straight at his brother; both men were deadly pale. Ormarr stood still for a moment, and said:

"You are playing a dangerous game, brother Ketill." Then he passed on.

But now Ørlygur rose to his feet, Alma still clinging to his arm, and called out in a loud, firm voice:

"Ormarr!"

Ormarr stopped, looked back, and strode to his father's side.

Alma still held the old man's arm. She clung to him, and begged imploringly: "Do not leave me here; take me back with you to Borg. Let me come with you and stay with you there."

Ørlygur patted her trembling hands, and said gently: "Ormarr will look after you, my dear." And to Ormarr he said: "Go with her home, and protect her, whatever happens. Do not let her leave Borg unless by her own desire. Be kind to her, my son. And now go, both of you. I will come presently."

But Alma held Ormarr back, and they did not leave the church.

Ørlygur had followed them down the aisle toward the door. Then he turned back, not noticing that they remained inside the church. When he had left them, old Kata emerged from her corner, and going up to Ormarr, asked: "May I come with you to Borg and stay?"

Alma caught her hand, and Ormarr nodded in consent. Alma was trembling pitifully; Ormarr and Kata had to support her.

Ørlygur à Borg walked back toward the pulpit, stopped in front of it, and said:

"This is the House of God. But it seems that the Evil One has usurped His place. I am to be driven out from it—well and good. But before I go, let me tell what all these righteous folk are full of zeal to know."

And pointing to the priest in the pulpit, he went on: "There is the father of the child."

When Alma heard the old man's words, it was as if the inward tension of the past months had suddenly given way. Her features relaxed, she ceased to tremble, and her eyes lost their fire. She felt as if she were sinking into a sea of mist. And then to nothingness.

The light of her mind was suddenly extinguished, her soul had taken flight, back to the eternity whence it had come. Only her body remained, panting, unharmed, a living monument to that which had gone, an empty dwelling, that has not yet crumbled, though the last living thing it sheltered, the last thought, is gone.

A wave of astonishment swept through the congregation at Ørlygur's revelation. Then a moment after all was quiet once more.

Sera Ketill was still in the pulpit, pale as a corpse. He had reckoned with every possibility save only this; no form of defence, no counter-attack, but he would have had his answer ready. But this. . . . It was not like his father.

It was all over now. The words that meant his destruction were spoken. And yet he was still alive. The earth had not swallowed him up, no fire had descended from heaven to consume him. He was unhurt; ruined beyond help, yet he stood there as if nothing had happened. It seemed somehow ridiculous.

Ørlygur faced his son, speaking directly to him:

"How could you do this thing? And how could ever God permit it? How could He tolerate a hypocrite in His House? My son, I do not hate you, and yet I say: Be thou accursed until repentance and charity have filled your soul. Ay, I curse my son, not because I hate him, but because of my love for him. Accursed—be accursed until our Heavenly Father shall have let the glory of His goodness penetrate into

your soul, and the darkness of the Evil One give place to light. May your soul never rest, and may it never leave its earthly dwelling, until Almighty God has given the sign of His forgiveness!"

The congregation sat in awed silence while Ørlygur was speaking. When the old man had finished, he turned to leave the church. But he tottered, and would have fallen had he not grasped at the side of a seat for support.

Ormarr hurried to his side, leaving Kata to look after Alma. Ørlygur sank helpless into his son's arms. The congregation looked on as if spellbound; no one moved.

The old man put his hand to his heart and murmured; "I am dying. Heavenly Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Ormarr laid him down on the floor of the church, and stood bending over him, at a loss what next to do. The old man seemed trying to speak. Ormarr put his ear close to his father's mouth, and caught the words:

"... home . . . to Borg."

They were the last words Ørlygur à Borg ever uttered.

Ormarr felt his father's heart and pulse—it was all over. Lifting the body tenderly in his arms, he carried it out of the church.

Old Kata, standing by the entrance, crossed herself and muttered something about the ways of the Lord. . . . Then to herself she added:

"So it was *his* death the ravens came to tell!"

And Kata took the unconscious Alma by the hand and followed after Ormarr and his burden.

When they had left, an old peasant rose and walked out of the church. Then the congregation followed, walking with downcast eyes, a few only casting furtive glances in the direction of the pulpit, where Sera Ketill stood.

Ormarr carried his father across the churchyard to the horses, Kata and Alma following close behind. When he saw his sister-in-law's condition, he shivered.

Kata was watching him. "Ay," she said, "her poor troubled soul's found rest at last. And we should thank the

Lord that He took her reason. Let me come and nurse her—she'll need no other help as long as I live."

Ormarr was puzzled to think how he should get his father's body and the two women home, with but two horses for the journey. Sleipnir could easily carry him and his father's body. With a side-saddle, Alma could have mounted the second horse, Kata leading it. As it was, the women would have to walk, and he must ride at a foot-pace the whole way. There was nothing else to be done that he could see.

He was on the point of telling Kata his plan when he perceived the congregation crowding round. The old peasant who had first left the church came up to him, and said: "You will let us carry the old chief home to Borg?"

Ormarr turned on him furiously.

"You have killed my father among you; not one of you shall touch his body."

But the old peasant would not give way. His voice was thick with emotion as he went on:

"We have done a great injustice to your father. You will not forbid us now to make amends as far as we can. Had he lived, we should have come to him, to ask his forgiveness. And for all that you are his son, you know him little if you think he would have sent us away unheard. He was too generous for that."

Ormarr saw that there were tears in the man's eyes. He glanced round the circle, and saw everywhere bowed heads and evident distress. And suddenly he remembered his father's dream.

"True," he said. "It is your right to pay him the last honour on earth. Carry him home."

A bier was found, and the party moved off, with Ormarr at the head. Alma, with eyes staring blankly before her, walked between him and old Kata.

All the others, men, women, and children, followed on foot, leading their horses. Never had the parish seen so impressive a funeral train, nor such a numerous following.

They moved but slowly, step by step, all the long road to

Borg, the men relieving one another at the bier. As soon as the body was lifted up, they commenced with one accord to sing the beautiful funeral hymn:

“Alt eins og blomstrid eina.”

They sang through all the verses, and when it was ended, another hymn was sung; afterwards, the first again.

Singing and sobbing, the procession moved on—a strange sight to see. The birds circled round the train in silence, forgetting for a moment their spring song. But the sky was clear and blue as before.

So they passed along the way. When they reached the river, Ormarr took Alma and Kata in his arms and carried them across. The men waded over likewise, leading their horses; only the women and children crossed on horseback.

At last they came to Borg. The body of the chief was laid on a big table in the hall, and another hymn was sung. The followers were about to move off, when Ormarr turned to them and said:

“You have carried my father home, and I thank you. I know that he was always your friend, and if you will accept the friendship I offer you now, it would be as he wished. I hope to hold the place he held amongst you—that of a brother and friend. And if you have need of me in any way, you know where to find me. You must be tired and hungry now. If you will break bread under my roof now, before you return, then I take it that the good-will that was of old between Borg and its neighbours is there still.”

When he had finished speaking, he had to shake hands with all. At his suggestion the women went out to the kitchen and pantries to prepare food.

It was late, and all had been well cared for, when the guests rode away. But, before they left, the whole staff of servants and hands who had been at Borg that spring had returned, having obtained release from their later masters, and permission from Ormarr to re-enter their former service.

Alma never recovered. She wandered about like a living corpse. Old Kata nursed her as well as she could, consoling

herself and others with the thought that she did not suffer. Alma was no longer conscious of joy or pain.

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Sera Ketill stood in the pulpit, watching his people leave the church. He made no movement, but followed all with observant eyes.

He saw how the scene had affected his wife, and that she had sought refuge with his father. And he understood that he had lost her for ever. Then, marking the change in her expression, he suspected the truth: that she had lost her reason on hearing her husband denounced by his own father.

He listened to his father's curse, and saw him sink to the ground and die. He heard the congregation singing hymns outside the church. Then gradually all sound died away . . . the last he heard was a vague murmur—fragments of the singing borne by errant winds towards him through the open door.

Still he remained in the pulpit, leaning on his arms, as if nothing had happened. He did not think. A scornful smile seemed frozen on his lips; he suddenly realized that he was sneering, and wondered how long he had been doing so. And then it came to him painfully that he could not rest until he knew what it was all about; he must wake, and look at things and see. And suddenly it dawned upon him that he was sneering at himself. He drew himself up and laughed aloud, as if in an endeavour to break the terrible stillness of the church. He marked the harsh, uncanny sound of his own laughter. And, stepping down from the pulpit, he left the church.

From the churchyard he could see the funeral procession moving towards Borg. He watched it for a while, tried to laugh, but in vain. He went home, and found the house empty. Looked into the servants' quarters—the place was deserted. He went out again and searched about outside.

Coming back to the house, after making sure that there was not a soul to be seen, he found a dog beside the door. The animal slunk away. Ketill spoke to it softly, beckoned

to it, trying with friendly voice and gesture to call it to him. But the dog would not come, and finally ran away.

Ketill looked after it without any sign of emotion. Then he went indoors and sat down at his writing-table. He sat there all through the day, still wearing his vestments. Thoughts crowded in upon him—thoughts that he could not drive away.

He had sinned against life, taking the gift of life in vain. And now he was alone, an outcast, rejected and despised by all. Even a dog disowned him.

He had sinned against God, taking His name in vain. The House of God was closed to him. Alone, cursed by his father and abandoned by his God!

He had sinned against love; he had used his utmost efforts to ruin the lives of two innocent women. God had intervened to save them: the one through the love of human beings, the other by taking away her reason. And he—he was left alone and shunned by all. The world was full of love around him, on every side were human beings, his fellow-creatures, loving and being loved. To him only love was denied; for him alone there was no kindly thought in any single heart. All who knew him hated and despised him. He had crushed the flower of love underfoot—it would bloom no more on his way, nor gladden him by its fragrance.

Alone. And what should he do now? Why could *he* not sink to the earth and die? Why was not his body given to the worms? Why could he not rot away, and return to dust? What had he to do with life now? Or was it that life had not yet done with him?

He made no effort to check the current of his thoughts, but suffered them to come and go as they pleased.

Tears flowed down his cheeks. There was a strange sensation at his heart now, as if despair and loneliness were to become a source of joy; something akin to what the earth must feel when spring casts loose the fetters of winter.

He sat on. The faint, scarcely perceptible northern twilight crept into the room; he did not mark it. He had forgot-

ten the existence of time. His only thought was that he was alone.

Alone.

And suddenly he fell on his knees. On hands and knees he crept out of the room, through the passage, out into the courtyard and across the enclosure, through the churchyard up to the door of the church.

He pressed his forehead against the granite steps, and sobbed bitterly.

The sun showed in the north, a dull red glow, with the sky deeper and darker round it. Farther off hung clouds, a delicate rose, neatly and regularly in tier upon tier. Night, but the sun was there. The meadows were thickly veiled with dew. All nature was at peace.

But before the door of one poor dark little church lay the priest, his forehead pressed against the cold stone.

And for the first time in his life he prayed from his heart to the God in whom he had never before believed.

"Peace, Lord, give peace to my soul!"

But there was no peace.

Ketill lay there long, sobbing and praying. Then, rising, he stood with bowed head and clasped hands, and whispered:

"Lord, I will seek Thee and Thy peace. My life shall be a prayer and a cry to Thee. And Thou who hast said: 'Seek, and ye shall find; ask, and it shall be given unto you'—Thou wilt not deny me peace. A humble and a contrite heart . . ."

BOOK III

GUEST THE ONE-EYED

CHAPTER I

A GREY, dull day—not a glimpse of the sun since morning.

A man came hobbling along the little-used path, a solitary figure under the leaden sky. The clouds hung so low that it seemed as if the heavens had fallen, and were supported only by the mountain peaks on the horizon. A grey, dull day—and the man's spirit was grey and dull within him. All that the day had given him was a fragment of a song that had sprung into his mind; he hummed it half-consciously as he went along.

“No sun over the sand,
Waste, waste.
No eagle over land,
Dead, dead.”

His voice was deep and hollow-sounding; in its depth a ring of loneliness and unsatisfied longing. There seemed a power of fate and sorrow behind it, as behind the dull roar of the sea. The eternal restlessness of life, and the boundless seeking of the soul quivered in this old man's voice. Strong, yet soft, its tones had power at times to move those who heard to sadness in themselves.

He felt a peculiar comfort in the sound of his own voice when wandering thus alone; and he was a man who wandered much alone. And for all that he carried no heavy burden, his steps often faltered.

His right leg was crippled, which made journeying none the easier; the stout staff he carried was but a poor substitute for a sound limb.

Despite his infirmity, he tramped the country far and wide. Just now, he was on his way across the chain of hills to the north of Hofsfjordur, known as the Dark Mountains.

He had never been in Hofsfjordur. All the other districts round he had visited many a time in his twenty years of vagabond life, but somehow he had always passed by this. If any asked him why, he might answer that it was because of the bad roads. Yet he was well used to roads that were no better.

However it might be, this time he was on his way. The day was drawing to a close, and he had still far to go. The night would be dark, and hopeless then to find his way; there was nothing for it but to find some sheltered spot where he could rest.

He was thoroughly tired, and his lameness was more marked than usual; his sound leg too was aching from its unfair share of the work. He rocked along uncertainly, like a machine on the verge of breakdown, or a windmill making its last rotations before a calm.

His heavy coat dragged like the wings of a wounded bird. It was a picture well in keeping with the landscape, the man with his long white beard, the tangled grey hair showing below a big soft hat of the indeterminate colour of age. From beneath his bushy brows showed the glimpse of an eye—he had but one—almost unearthly in its intelligence and penetrating glance. His whole appearance, with his beggar's pouch and limping gait, presented an almost unreal effect, harmonizing to a striking degree with the surroundings. He seemed to be in his element in this waste tract, beneath the low-lying clouds that at times almost enveloped him.

He limped on, a monarch in the realm of mist and solitude.

But there was nothing of power in his thoughts. He simply felt at home here, and in no way disheartened at the prospect of a night in the open.

Again and again he hummed his fragment of a song. It was his way to make up such refrains as he walked, humming them hour after hour to while away the tedium of the road. Also, it was a form of expression, giving relief to his feelings and easing his mind.

At last, after innumerable repetitions of his melancholy chant, he fell silent. Not all at once, but stopping for a little,

then taking it up and stopping again, with longer and longer pauses between. And his glance grew dull, his brow wrinkled and furrowed. Night was at hand; he stopped on a sudden as if to make a survey of his surroundings.

"Here am I, a worm in all creation," he muttered. "And the day has left me up on a desolate hill. Make haste, Eye, and find us a place to rest."

Gradually the fog lifted, and the sky cleared. The darkness, however, grew more intense, and the contours of the hills were soon almost indistinguishable.

The wanderer glanced around, searching for some corner that might offer some little shelter. Comfort and warmth were not to be expected in these regions. But at length he spied two boulders leaning one against the other. "Like brothers," he thought to himself, and added aloud:

"Good evening, brothers!"

The sense of loneliness vanished, and his heart was glad; he seemed to feel already a bond of kindness between him and this his night's abode. Pleasanter thoughts rose in his mind, and he gripped his faithful staff with a heartiness that might once have been extended to his fellow-men. Now, the staff was almost his only friend. He spoke to it aloud, thanking it for help during the day; he even felt somewhat shamed at not having done so before. He dug and scraped away a heap of moss and little stones, to fill the northern opening between the boulders, making a kind of cave.

This done, he opened his wallet and took out some food, given him earlier in the day by some kindly soul, and ate it, lying in the shelter of his cave. When the meal was finished, he rose to his knees, and hid his face for a moment in his hands, as if silently returning thanks.

Then after some shifting about, he curled himself up in the most convenient position within the cramped space at his disposal. He patted the hard stones, and spoke, half aloud, as his thoughts came.

"Feel strangely happy this evening. Not lonely now, just at home. Nice soft sand here to lie on. And the stones that lie there saying nothing, they are like friends. Battered

about, like me, by sun and storms and time. Ay, we've much in common, for all they stay still and I'm for ever moving from place to place. Who knows—perhaps this night may be my longest at last. Must come some time—some night be night for ever. If so, 'tis a good place for old bones to rest. Maybe there comes One tonight to take the unrest out of my soul and give me the peace I've sought. If so, why, call up all the worms and creeping things that live on flesh, and make a feast of me."

Drowsiness crept over him; he closed his eyes and prayed:

"Lord, see the end of one more day in Thy service. Lord, may it please Thee soon to lift the burden from my shoulders—the burden of sin. Lord, Thou knowest my heart is full of penitence and distress; Lord, grant me soon Thy peace. Amen!"

He ceased, and lay for a while without opening his eyes. Then, turning over on his side, he huddled himself up for warmth, and resigned himself to what the night might bring—rest, or the fever of sleeplessness.

CHAPTER II

MORNING broke with the clear brightness of an autumn sky above the hills.

At the first sight of dawn, the old man limped out from his cave, beat his hands together, and stamped his sound leg repeatedly, to get some warmth into his body. And as he did so, he thought:

"So! Once more Death has passed me by. Not worth taking. . . ."

Then, penitently, he whispered:

"Lord, Thy will be done! Thanks be to Thee for the night that is gone, and for all trials that are sent from Thee. Be not angry, Lord, if I long for the peace of Death."

The sun came up, and the man sat down on a stone, bared his head and stretched out his hands to meet the warmth of the first rays; he smiled towards the light, that gave but little warmth as yet.

When the first cold of waking had passed, he ate his last scraps of food, and prepared to move.

The mood of last night and his gloomy thoughts seemed strange to remember now; he smiled involuntarily at the difference between his feeling then and now.

"Never twice alike," he murmured. "What's truth, I wonder? Can there be any truth in thoughts and feelings that change between dark and dawn? Where's the note that lasts and does not change?"

He turned to go, when something made him pause. And, smiling indulgently at himself for his foolishness, he stooped and picked away the moss and stones with which he had closed the opening the night before. Then he patted the two rocks that had sheltered him, and went on his way with an easier mind. Who could say? Perhaps they were lonely there, and would have been sorry to feel the way barred to

the passage of the wind that told so many things as it sang through the sharp-edged cleft.

He limped off, moving stiffly at first, his limbs still feeling the cold. He found the path he had left the night before in his search for a resting-place, and went on his way towards Hofsfjordur.

The sun rose higher in the heavens, and dried the dew from the rocks, warming their surface where they faced it, while the northward sides were still dark with moisture. In the shade, the moss glistened with dew. As far as eye could see, there was no growth save the brown and green of moss. But the old wanderer felt quite content; he was at home among these rock-strewn hills, so rich in their weird grouping and fantastic outlines. He was among friends here, and as he passed the massive boulders he touched them with his hand caressingly, grateful for the warmth that passed into his blood. The sun had given it, and they passed it on.

He reached Langeryg, a narrow ridge between two steep ravines, and stopped to look around him. Farther on was a meadow of pale green grass, but not a living soul was to be seen.

Slowly he went on his way, keeping carefully to the middle between the steep and dangerous precipices on either hand. A sinister place this, and of ill repute, perilous especially in mist or darkness. Even now, in the light of day, the wind moaned dismally round the sharp rocks, to the one side, that known as Death's Cliff, though, strangely enough, no sound came from the other, that was called the Silent Cliff. There was a legend current that the two had been daughters of a king—one good, the other wicked, one dark, the other fair. And the silent chasm was the good princess who sat listening in horror to the evil doings of her sister. And it was said that if any could be found to cast himself voluntarily over the Silent Cliff, he would escape unharmed, and the ravines would close for ever.

Half-way along the track, the old man felt tempted to peer down over the edge of Death's Cliff. Mastering a feeling of dread, he crept cautiously to the brink, and looked down,

but could discern nothing in the darkness below. Suddenly a great black bird fluttered up out of the gloom, and he started back. The bird uttered a hoarse cry—and the man smiled to himself. Only a raven, that had been to visit the princess—or perhaps to see if there were any unfortunate creatures there on which to feast.

With a sigh of relief he drew back from his perilous position, and threw himself down on a patch of grass to rest. Grass was a welcome thing among these barren hills, and the sight of it gladdened him. He found himself studying each little stalk as if it were a wonder to be remembered.

And suddenly tears rose to his eyes; his lips quivered, and he murmured:

“Ay, there are many little joys in life. . . .”

He glanced down the path ahead; first a flat stretch of grass, and then over a long, stony rise. There at the top he knew was a cairn, from which one could look out over Hofsfjordur.

Somehow or other, he felt disinclined to go on, and yet there was something that urged him forward. He felt nervous and anxious, as a boy about to undertake some responsible task for the first time.

When at last he reached the summit of the slope, he stopped and looked down. There it was at last, the shore where he had spent his childhood. There lay the blue fjord, the rocky ness, the glittering stream, the grassy slopes—all that he had so often thought of with affectionate longing. Ay, he had come to love it all—since he had left it.

Tears dimmed his vision as he looked. And yet he was happy. He had crossed the boundary now; he was coming home.

CHAPTER III

HE had been standing for some time leaning against the cairn, when suddenly he heard a dog barking. He turned in the direction of the sound, and perceived a young man approaching. At sight of a fellow-creature, he forgot all else.

The newcomer called to his dog, and the animal was silent at once. But the voice of the stranger went to the wanderer's heart as had never a voice before.

He limped towards him, and held out his hand, a glad smile on his wrinkled face.

The two exchanged greetings, and stood for a moment taking stock of each other. The evident emotion of the older man was not lost upon the stranger.

"A beautiful day," said the latter after a pause.

"Do your sheep stray as far afield as this?" asked the other. He seemed to be taking in every detail of the stranger's appearance as he spoke. He listened, moreover, rather to his voice than to his words, though the other was not aware of this—as little as he guessed that the old man had seen his face many years ago, and recognized him now.

"Who are you?" asked the young man, somewhat ill at ease.

"A poor wanderer," was the reply.

"And your name?"

The old man hesitated. "My name," he said at last—"there's none remembers it for aught but ill."

"Where are you going now?"

"Going? I go from place to place, and live by grace of God and my fellow-men. I am going to Hofsfjordur. I have never been there before."

"Then you will come to Borg, no doubt?"

"Yes," said the old man, with a queer smile. "I shall come to Borg."

"You have not seen any sheep on your way? Or any sign?"

"Nay, naught but a raven flying up from below Death's Cliff. 'Tis the only living creature I have seen. Were you going farther?"

"No. I can see as far as I need from here. We can go down together; I have looked enough for today."

"Have you lost many sheep?"

"No. Only a white lamb with black feet and head. It was a sensible beast, and strong, when it went up with the rest in the spring—I can hardly think any fox could have harmed it. But it was a favourite, and I must find it."

"You are from Borg, then?" queried the old man, looking away.

"Yes. My name is Ørlygur."

"Ørlygur the younger, that will be?"

"There is no other now. Ørlygur, my grandfather, died many years ago."

"Yes, that is true. He died in the church at Hof. I was there at the time. True . . ."

"So you *have* been here before?"

"No—no. It was—my other self that was here then."

The young man seemed busy with thoughts of his own; he took no notice of the strange reply. He stood gazing for some moments into distance, then turned and looked searchingly at the wanderer.

"Then you must have known Sera Ketill? He is dead, too."

"Yes, I knew Sera Ketill," repeated the old man. And in a curiously toneless voice he went on: "He is dead, too. Yes . . ."

There was a long pause. The young man realized that he could not here, in broad daylight, ask all he would of this stranger, who, he perceived, could tell him much.

Such talk was for the dark, when men can speak together without reserve.

"Will you come back with me now, to Borg?" he asked.

"No. I must go elsewhere."

"But you will come to Borg? You give me your word?"

"I give you my word. No beggar ever came this way and did not ask for alms at Borg."

Ørlygur was somewhat embarrassed, and said in a kindly tone:

"Let me give you some food now. We can share it."

"Heaven bless you," said the old man.

They walked down the slope together, and found a seat on a grassy mound. Ørlygur opened his haversack and took out first a new pair of shoes.

"Take these, will you not?" he asked shyly. "Yours are badly worn. I brought these with me in case my own gave out. But they will last me home easily."

The old man took them gladly, and let his fingers glide caressingly along the clean soles. He put them on, and looked up with deep gratitude in his face.

"Fine shoes," he said, and laughed happily.

"It does not take much to please you," said Ørlygur, with a smile. "And now let us have something to eat."

They ate in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. Ørlygur was watching his companion, and noticed now for the first time that one eye was closed. The man's appearance seemed less repulsive now than at first. Evidently, one who had seen better days.

When the old man had finished he wiped his mouth and murmured something to himself, then added aloud:

"Thanks be to God." And he reached out for Ørlygur's hand in thanks, looking at it closely as he did so.

The man's touch had a curious effect upon Ørlygur, at once pleasing and the reverse. He was well used to shaking hands with men, whether friends or strangers, and did so usually without a thought. But with this beggar it was different; he felt an impulse to embrace him, and

at the same time shrank from giving him his hand at all.

They walked on side by side, but for a long time no word was spoken. Often the old man stopped, and leaned on his staff to rest. At length they reached the point where the road branched off to Nordurdalur. Here they halted, and sat down without a word.

The old man was the first to speak.

"You will cross the stream now, I take it, and take the shorter road. I am going down alongside the stream. I can reach Bolli in an hour's time. There is still some one living there?"

"You must know the neighbourhood well," said Ørlygur. "Yes; a widow lives there with her daughter." And he blushed.

The old man noticed it and smiled. "Here is a young man who is still a child," he thought. "Cannot speak of the widow's daughter without blushing. If I had not been a stranger he would not have spoken of her at all."

Aloud, he said: "I hope they'll give me leave to sleep in a barn tonight. You're not going that way yourself?"

Ørlygur looked aside. "No," he said shortly.

"Shall I tell them I've met you—by way of greeting?" he asked.

"Yes."

Ørlygur did not look up. The old man rose and came towards him. "Good-bye," he said, offering his hand.

"And thank you for good company."

"Good-bye and thanks."

Ørlygur sat looking after the old man as he went. Then, suddenly springing to his feet, he ran after him and asked:

"Will you not tell me your name?"

"Men call me 'Guest the One-eyed,'" answered the wanderer quietly, and smiled.

Ørlygur said nothing, but his face showed that the name was not unknown to him.

"Good-bye, again, Ørlygur à Borg."

"Good-bye, Guest One-eyed, and God be with you,"

answered Ørlygur reverently, pressing the other's hand.

The wanderer went on his way, following the course of the stream. Ørlygur watched him till he was out of sight, and stood for a long while looking down the way he had gone.

CHAPTER IV

THE sun had vanished behind the western heights when Ørlygur at last roused himself from gazing down the valley. The figure had disappeared long since.

The name of Guest the One-eyed had always seemed to him a part of some fantastic story; now, however, it had become a reality; he had seen and spoken to the man.

He knew that this Guest was a wandering beggar, and had heard many stories current concerning him. He knew also that Guest the One-eyed had never before visited Hofsfjordur—possibly it was this fact which had led him to regard the stories as stories only, without reality. Now that he had learned that the man had apparently lived in Hofsfjordur before, under another name, it seemed strange to him—it had never struck him before that the name of Guest the One-eyed must have had some natural origin.

As with all young and simple folk who had heard of Guest the One-eyed, Ørlygur felt an affection for the singular character of report. Many were the instances on record of kindness and courtesy shown by the wanderer in his journeyings. He had lost one eye in saving a child from a burning farm; his crippled leg was the result of his having flung himself in the way of a sledge that was hurrying towards a dangerous cliff—the life he had thus saved being that of no more romantic personage than an elderly and by no means beautiful servant girl. This latter incident had been the cause of some ill-placed amusement among the peasantry, for it was known that the girl had been merely making a foolhardy attempt to win the heart of one of the labourers near by. Her rescuer, however,

before leaving the farm, made it his business to see that the marriage was duly accomplished.

Ørlygur knew, also, that Guest the One-eyed had a peculiar faculty of getting over difficulties and removing misunderstandings; in more than one instance he had been the means of ending an irreconcilable feud and establishing firm friendship in its stead.

A legendary hero in real life, and gifted with wisdom far beyond that of his fellows. Yet he never used his powers for his own advantage. Nobler than those around him, he was nevertheless content to tramp the country in rags, with a beggar's staff. In point of intelligence, he seemed fitted to be the adviser of kings; yet he chose to live alone, and to seek his rest in barns and outhouses. All of which led folk to look upon him as the personification of something beneficent—the spirit of kindness and good-will. And Ørlygur himself had felt the same.

He felt a great desire to follow after the old man; a craving for adventure within him even suggested the idea of throwing in his lot with him, and sharing his wanderings.

But as the sun went down, he woke from his dreams and, pulling himself together, made his way rapidly towards home.

Half-way over the stream he stopped suddenly; the water seemed like a flood of gold pouring towards him, glittering with strange reflections in the evening light. And the play of colour, with the murmur of the stream, held him for a moment entranced. Was it a dream, or had he really met Guest the One-eyed in the flesh?

Once across, however, the spell was broken, and Ørlygur was a boy again, filled with no more romantic fancy for the moment than an impulse to run races with his dog. He called to the animal, and they raced away, tearing along at top speed.

As he ran, Ørlygur was conscious that he was eager to get home and relate his adventure; to tell of his conversation with the One-eyed Guest, and announce the arrival of the hero.

He raced on homeward, leaving the dog far behind. The animal followed at its best, till it saw him leap the fence of the enclosure, when it gave up and lay down panting breathlessly.

Ørlygur likewise could run no more, and slackened to a walk. Noticing his foster-father approaching, he made towards him.

Ormarr Ørlygsson had seen the lad come tearing down the slope, his hat off, and his hair streaming in the wind. He knew how the boy delighted in long walks and violent outbursts of energy, but this exuberance of spirits caused him some uneasiness at times—he knew that a day would come when the natural safety-valve of youth would no longer suffice. Yet he could not suppress a smile of pleasure at sight of the handsome lad as he raced away at a speed which bade fair to tire even his horses and dogs.

Often he reflected how like the boy was to his father—the same fair hair, the same blue eyes, the same splendid build; the figure of a young god.

And he thought, with a mingling of unconscious love and conscious hate, of his brother Ketill, who had disappeared the night after that terrible scene that had caused his father's death and lost his wife her reason. It was said that he had drowned himself—he had last been seen on the cliffs near the fjord. True, the body had never been recovered. Still, it might have been carried out to sea.

After the revelation of that day, when the facts had been made common knowledge, and seeing that Ketill had disappeared, in all likelihood never to return, Ormarr had ceased to give out Ørlygur, Ketill's and Runa's child, as his own. He and Runa had continued to live as man and wife, but no children had been born to them.

They lived peacefully and happily at the farm, with never an unkind word between them. At all times, whether they spoke or were silent, there was a mutual bond of perfect confidence and affection between them. Life had brought them together in a strange and merciless fashion, but the innate good sense and nobility of both had turned

all to the good. They knew that they had never been lovers in the sense in which love is generally understood, yet, as the years passed, there grew up between them a happiness of each in each that filled their lives. And their mutual trust gave them a surer foundation on which to rest than any lovers' love could give.

Ørlygur rarely gave a thought to the fact that Ormarr was not his real father. He knew it, because Ormarr had once, in the presence of Runa, told him how matters stood. No details had been given, but the facts were plainly stated: Ormarr had promised to tell him the whole story some day, if he wished. But Ørlygur perceived that the subject was a painful one, and had asked no further since.

Had it not been from fragments of information gathered in course of time from one or another outside the home, he would have known but little. What he did know made towards the conclusion that his father had been a bad man, who had wrought harm to his own kin. But strangely enough, he, Ørlygur, did not suffer thereby. The misfortunes that had come after seemed to have wiped away, as it were, the stain on the family honour, and as years went by, the recollection of Sera Ketill seemed gradually to lose its association with the house of Borg. The story of Sera Ketill lived on—a gruesome tale enough in itself. But it had become a thing apart.

And Ørlygur, growing up at Borg, became one of the family there, until it was almost forgotten that he was in any way related to his father, Sera Ketill of unblessed memory. Ørlygur was aware of this, and at times could feel a kind of remorse at the thought—for, after all, his father was his father. . . . And, as he grew up, he tried to picture to himself what his father had really been. In his inmost heart he could not quite believe him so utterly evil as report made out.

But there was no one whom he could ask—no one, indeed, to whom he could even speak on the subject at all. He could not bring himself to open a painful subject with his foster-father or his mother. There was only old Kata, the

faithful attendant of the poor witless Danish Lady. And Kata's replies to his questioning were always wrapped up in mysterious, incomprehensible allusions. Ørlygur, in common with others, regarded her as entering on her second childhood, though she was sound and active as ever in body.

Ørlygur was still out of breath when he reached Ormarr.

"Well," said the latter, "did you find the lamb? You look very pleased with yourself."

"No," said Ørlygur. "But I found—whom do you think? Guest the One-eyed! Right up at the very edge of the pastures, in the hills. And I went with him as far as Nördura. I didn't know who he was till we said good-bye. And I gave him my shoes, and he is wearing them now."

Ørlygur's delight and pride at this last fact were so evident that Ormarr could not help smiling.

"Why didn't you bring him back home with you?"

"He is coming. He promised faithfully he would. He was too tired now. Said he was going down the stream to one of the nearest farms there."

Ormarr did not fail to remark that the boy had avoided mentioning Bolli, but he made no sign of having noticed anything. He had an idea that Ørlygur cherished a fancy for the daughter there, but it seemed wiser to wait before taking any definite action. He was not at all pleased with the idea of a match between Ørlygur and the child of the so-called "widow" at Bolli. But he was loth to interfere with the boy's affairs—after all, he was of an age to choose for himself. And Ormarr knew too well that the men of his race were apt to be headstrong in affairs of the heart. On the other hand, if he were mistaken—if the affair were not really serious, his interference would do no good. If the damage were already done, and Ørlygur had made up his mind, then there was nothing to be done but wait and see.

Ørlygur himself did not know whether his parents were aware of his affection for Snebiorg, the girl from Bolli. But he was convinced that they would not agree with his choice. Even if they did not oppose it, he knew it would pain them.

Up to now, his will and conscience had always been in accord with theirs. In this case he was quite clear as to his own feelings, but was loth to bring matters to a head. There was time enough—no definite promise had as yet been given on either side, though there was certainly a tacit understanding between them.

Ormarr and Ørlygur walked across the enclosure together.

“And what else did he say—the old man?” asked Ormarr.

Ørlygur was at a loss for an answer. He could not remember anything else of importance, and it seemed somehow unsatisfactory to have met the celebrated vagabond, renowned for his wisdom, and bring back no utterance worthy of remark. He said nothing—and Ormarr did not press the question, but walked beside him with the quiet, peculiar smile that had become characteristic of him.

But when they reached the house, Ørlygur found himself once more a person of importance. Old Kata came hobbling towards him, and laid her hand on his arm.

“You have met him, and spoken. And felt joy of the meeting—more than with any other you have ever met. The Lord is great, and our eyes are blind. Yes; he will come now, and all will be well.”

Kata hobbled off again to her mistress, whom she never left for any length of time.

The two men stood watching her with a smile.

“She still has the gift, you sec,” observed Ormarr. “No need to tell her that you had met with Guest the One-eyed in the mountains.”

CHAPTER V

A LMA dragged on her timeless, feelingless existence under old Kata's care. Age had left no mark on her, though it was twenty years now since the tragic event that had deprived her of her reason. In the world about her there had been changes: those who had been in the prime of life at that time were now aged and infirm; the children of those days were grown. But Alma was to all appearances the same as on the day when she had left the church at Hof, released from suffering by the breakdown of all capacity to feel or understand. She looked a trifle healthier—less pale, that was all.

And her life now had, despite its essential monotony, a certain variation of a sort. She smiled happily when the sun shone, but wept when the clouds hid it from her sight. Her joys were those of childhood—fine weather, dumb animals, flowers, and the presence of certain chosen friends. There were some of her fellow-creatures whom she loved, without knowing why. Others she disliked no less distinctly, and contact with them would render her depressed for days. Strangers, in particular, invariably troubled her mind.

In course of time, people had come to attribute this discrimination to a strange instinct that had taken the place of the ordinary human intelligence she no longer possessed. She was still spoken of as the Danish Lady at Hof, though for years she had not set her foot outside the limits of Borg.

She spoke but little. It seemed as if she had forgotten not only her native tongue, but also the little Icelandic she had ever learnt. She picked up odd words and sentences, however, uttering them afterwards incoherently. And she had a kind of language of her own invention—a combination of curious expressions and strange gestures, which

those about her learned to understand. Old Kata was an adept in this mode of intercourse, and pleased her mistress by her quickness of understanding.

The two women occupied one room, with two windows, in which they had their favourite seats. They would sit there for hours, old Kata with her knitting, and Alma gazing at the world outside, and following with childish interest anything that might be happening within view. For the most part, they were silent, but now and again passers-by might hear them exchanging words in their own unintelligible form of speech.

They had little to do with others, though Alma knew all the servants and farm hands on the place. All loved her, and towards old Kata, too, the general feeling was one of kindly regard.

On Sundays they joined the circle for Bible reading or singing, after which coffee was handed round, Alma playing the part of hostess. It was one of the small recurring pleasures in her life, and both she and Kata found an ever-new delight in the arrangement.

Sometimes the master, Ormarr Ørlygsson, if so disposed, would bring out his violin and treat his people to an entertainment. He invariably began with merry tunes, and finished with strange, heart-stirring themes; the simple listeners knew nothing of the great composers, but the music had its own effect on them, and often brought tears to the eyes of the more impressionable amongst them.

When he had played thus, Ormarr would leave the room abruptly; the rest, sitting in silence, would hear him leave the house. And then the party broke up, each to his work or play.

But Ormarr went off alone into the hills. At times he might be seen pacing to and fro; sometimes he would find some spot where he could lie and rest, but he never returned to the farm until all had retired for the night. There were always two, however, who waited his return. One was old Kata, who sat by the window till she saw or heard him back again—sat weeping, though he never dreamed of any

such sympathy on her part. Not till she knew that he was safely within doors—had fought out that day's fight with his God, as she put it to herself—would she go to rest.

The other was his wife, lying awake in bed till he came. No words were spoken when he returned; in silence he lay down at her side, drawing close to her, with one arm round her neck. Lying thus, rest would come to him and he could sleep.

The only other event in the life of Alma and her aged nurse was when visitors came to the place. All invariably came in to pay their respects to the Danish Lady however brief their stay or how pressing their errand might be. Some did so from a natural desire to show their sympathy with one afflicted by God; others from a secret fear that God would punish them if they did not. And Alma seemed able to distinguish between those who came of their own kind will and those who merely obeyed a custom they feared to break.

CHAPTER VI

GUEST THE ONE-EYED limped wearily along by the side of the stream.

The path he followed wound with many turns, following the course of the water, and in places quite near to the edge, the bank sometimes overhanging the riverbed below. At one spot the river actually tunnelled its way underground for some few yards, leaving a kind of natural bridge above. When he reached this spot the wanderer knew that he was not far from Bolli.

His thoughts were busy with recollection of the young man he had met up in the hills.

"So that was he," he thought to himself. "A handsome lad, strong and manly, and of a kindly heart, by his eyes." He thought of the evident pleasure with which the boy had given him the shoes and shared his food with him. Ay, a true son of his race—little fear of *his* bringing sorrow upon Borg.

And the old man's heart beat faster at the thought that he would soon see the girl whom Ørlygur had chosen for his bride. His knowledge of men had enabled him to read clearly enough the signs of Ørlygur's feeling; it was evident, also, that the two young people understood each other.

He forgot his weariness and hurried on.

Then, rounding a bend of the river, he came suddenly upon the tiny homestead, a cluster of small buildings on a little piece of rising ground. A thin smoke rose from a chimney—that must be from the open hearth in the kitchen. The ground outside was marked by heaps of hay, in regular rows; a solitary horse was grazing on the hillside, and a few sheep nosed about among the rocks down by the river.

For some minutes he stood looking over the place. So

this was where the two women passed their quiet lives. Mother and daughter, living for some reason apart from their neighbours. The old wanderer knew well enough that it was often not the worst of human kind that chose to live aloof from their fellows.

As he approached the house, a dog ran out barking angrily. Immediately after, a young woman appeared. At first sight of the strange figure coming towards her, she turned as if to go indoors again, but changed her mind and advanced to meet him.

"Here is one who is tired," said she. "Can I help you, old man?"

And she took his arm.

"Thanks, blessed child," said the old man, with a smile.

The girl looked up at his face.

"Oh—you have only one eye!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," answered the stranger, with a chuckle. "Worms couldn't wait for it. They'll have the other one soon, and the rest of me with it."

"You should not talk like that," said the girl, with childish displeasure.

Guest the One-eyed changed his tone. "Yes," he said earnestly. "You are young and wise, and I am old and foolish. 'Tis not a matter for jesting. What is your name, child?"

"Snebiorg is my name. Mother calls me Bagga, but I don't let other people call me that—or only one other, perhaps, if he cares to. And you perhaps, too, because you are not like other folk."

"One other—if he cares to? Don't you know whether he cares to or not?"

"No—for I have never spoken to him."

"But—are you not lovers, then?"

"Yes."

"And you mean to say you have never spoken—only written letters to each other?"

"Written? No." Bagga looked up in surprise. "We have looked at each other. Isn't that enough?"

There was a strange earnestness in the old man's voice as he answered:

"Surely it is enough. And are you very fond of him?"

"I love him."

They walked on in silence. Guest the One-eyed wished to have his message given before going into the house.

"I have seen him," he said. "And I was to bring you greeting from him."

The girl stopped still and clasped her hand to her breast. The colour had risen to her cheeks as she spoke of her lover; now she turned pale. The old man looked at her intently, taking in her fine profile, her beautiful eyes and lovely hair, the fineness of her figure. He realized that these two were destined for each other; that they *must* love each other at first sight.

Bagga could hardly speak at first. After a while she said:

"You have spoken to him? Is it long ago? What did he say? Did he ask you to bring me greeting?"

"No."

"But you said so just now!" She looked at him with tears in her eyes.

"I asked if I should bring you greeting, and he said yes. And I read more in his eyes. Can you guess what?"

"No."

"That he loves you, and is for ever thinking of you. That he will always be true to you."

"That I knew long ago. But how could you know that it was he?"

"It needs not long to find out that. Shall I tell you his name?"

"No," answered the girl, colouringly deeply. "Did he say anything else? Was he looking for a lamb that had strayed?"

"Yes, a favourite lamb, and he was afraid some fox might have harmed it."

Bagga looked serious.

"It is here," she said hesitatingly. "It strayed over here early in the summer, and I have been keeping it with our sheep. I knew it was his, and I could not bear to part with it. But tonight, when every one is asleep, I will take it over to Borg. Then he will find it in the morning, and be glad."

She smiled with pleasure at the thought.

"Can't you remember any more he said? Did you have a long talk with him?"

"Yes—but I have forgotten. He gave me these shoes I am wearing now."

Bagga was immediately keenly interested in the old man's shoes.

"I hope you have not worn a hole in them yet. But, if you have, I will mend them for you."

"No," answered the old man, with a quiet smile. "I am sorry to say there is nothing to mend."

Bagga blushed again, but added quickly, "But you can let me set them in oil for you tonight, then they will be soft in the morning. You will stay here tonight, will you not?"

"Gladly, if you will house me."

They had reached the door of the house, and Bagga led him through a dark passage into the room. Seated on a bed was an elderly woman, busy mending some clothes. The visitor noticed for the first time that the girl's clothing was almost as patched as his own. It was not so noticeable, however, in a pretty girl.

The old woman sat up and stared at him.

"Who is this?" she asked in surprise.

"A beggar, lady. Peace be with you."

The woman's glance softened.

"Come in," she said, "and welcome to what we can give. Sit down. Have you come far?"

"From across the Dark Mountains."

"So far—and you are lame? Quick, Bagga, make some coffee."

Bagga whispered something in her mother's ear. The latter looked at her daughter, and then at the stranger. Her glance expressed concern.

"Is it true? You have lost an eye, and lame as well?" She came towards him. "Then you must be . . . you are Guest the One-eyed?"

"So I am called," was the reply.

She grasped his hand, and her voice trembled.

"God bless you!" she said earnestly—"God bless you! And blessed be the hour that brought you here."

Bagga had left the room, and the two were alone.

"Where did you spend the night?"

"On the hills."

"And without shelter? How can you endure such hardships—an old man? . . ."

"I am well hardened to it by now. Though, to tell the truth, my shoulder is somewhat stiff from last night."

"I hope it may be no worse. Let me make up a bed for you now, and you can have a good rest."

"I would rather lie in the hayloft. A bed would seem strange to me now."

Somewhat unwillingly the widow agreed to let him have his way.

"So you have come to Hofsfjordur after all, though after many years."

"Yes; Fate has brought me here at last, in my old age."

"Then Fate is kind to us."

"Fate is always kind," replied the old man earnestly.

"Even when it brings us trouble and distress?"

"Then most of all, good soul, if you did but know."

"Even when it leads us into temptation—drives us to sin?" The widow looked up at him quickly as she spoke, and lowered her eyes again.

"We mortals are poor clay; God has need of strange ways to work us to His will."

"Then you think all that happens is decreed—a part of God's plan with us?"

"In a way, yes. Each man's actions are determined by

the nature of his soul; that makes his fate. All that men do is a result of their own character. But the deeds that we do most naturally are good. Therefore, we should each be master of ourself."

"But a sin committed can never be a good action or lead to any good. Surely it were better that such an act had never been?"

"A sin committed can bring out the good in one who is so made that the good in him can be reached by no other way. One can wander through many lands and yet not escape from one evil deed. The memory of it will stay fresh in the mind, and in time can soften the hardest heart, or make the weakest strong; good thoughts and strength of will grow out of it. I speak as I have found it. But perhaps you have not found it so."

The woman bent over her work.

"Yes," she said. "You speak the truth. I, too, have sinned, and the memory of it has made me better than I was, or ever could have been without it. But I never thought of it so until now."

Bagga entered with some food. She wore a bandage over one eye.

"What is it, child?—have you hurt yourself?" asked the mother anxiously.

Bagga blushed hotly, set down the plates, and tore away the handkerchief from her head, laughing nervously.

The others laughed too—it was easy to see what the girl had been doing.

"I forgot to take it off," she explained shyly. "It's not so very bad, after all, to have only one eye."

"Better to have two," said Guest the One-eyed. "More especially if they are as blue and as good as yours." And he looked at her with a kindly smile.

Bagga was still embarrassed; she glanced anxiously at the visitor, and asked: "You are not angry with me?"

He patted her arm. "How could I be? After you have given me leave to call you Bagga?"

"When you go away from here, I will go with you all the

way to the next place. I am strong, and I can carry your sack for you."

"That's kind of you. And I shall not be angry with you, not even if you fasten a stick to one leg just to see what it feels like to be lame!"

Bagga's cheeks were burning now; she was nearly crying.

"I—I did just now," she confessed. "And it was much worse than—the other. But I'll never do it again."

Guest the One-eyed burst out laughing. Even the girl's mother could not help joining in. And there was not much of anger in the rebuke she gave her daughter.

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT spread its broad, dark wings over the land. Under the shadow of night the world is changed from what it was while day still reigned. Fear, that the daylight holds in check, is then abroad, and the unseen seems nearer than before. All things are changed, save Love that is unalterable; Love that is constant whether in light or dark.

Guest the One-eyed had long since laid his tired limbs to rest in the hay, the widow's soul far, far away in the land of dreams, when the outer door of the house opened slowly; only a crack at first, through which the dog silently made its way, followed then by the girl, who stepped with careful, noiseless tread.

Bagga closed the door behind her without a sound, patted the dog, and whispered to it to be silent. And the intelligent beast seemed to understand that this was a business that must be kept secret between it and its mistress.

Off went the pair, in the direction of the stream, the dog hard at Bagga's heels, and evidently interested in the night's adventure.

As they neared the flock of sheep, where they lay huddled together for the night, she made the dog lie down, while she called softly, as was her wont, for Ørlygur's lamb. There was a slight commotion in the flock, and the black-headed lamb came trotting up.

Offering some bread she had brought with her, Bagga gradually enticed it away from the rest. She moved very slowly, to avoid alarming the others, over towards the natural bridge across the stream.

The dog trotted along behind, with its tail down. It was jealous of the lamb, knowing well that, when Bagga had it

with her, any other creature must take second place. To approach her now would mean a scolding, and the dog had no desire to be sent back home, just when there was every prospect of something quite unusual happening.

All went well. The lamb gave no trouble, and the dog followed at a safe distance.

But the girl's heart was sad; it was hard now to have to part with the lamb she had cherished as a link between her lover and herself—a tangible memory of the one she loved so deeply, yet with whom she had never spoken—whom she had only seen now and then at church on Sundays.

Reaching the bridge, she took off her garter and fastened it round the lamb's neck, to have something to hold by in case the animal should take fright. Then carefully she led it across, the earth underfoot vibrating all the time with the rush of the water below.

After a time, the supply of breadcrumbs having ceased, the lamb grew lazy, and showed signs of becoming rebellious. It seemed to resent having been thus disturbed in the middle of the night. As long as there had been compensation in the way of dainty morsels to nibble, it was perhaps worth it, but now it would prefer to lie down and chew the cud in peace.

Bagga, however, persisted, and with coaxing and scolding urged on her little charge.

It was a long road, but at last they reached Borg.

Quietly as possible she opened the gate of the enclosure. It would never do to rouse the dogs. Then she stroked the lamb sadly in farewell, her tears falling on its woolly fleece, and thrust it through the gate, which she closed after it.

She had forgotten to take her garter from its neck.

As she turned away from the gate, a feeling of loneliness and misery overcame her; it was as if she had lost the one treasure of her life—nothing was left but loneliness and emptiness. Then gradually she grew more composed. The dog marked her trouble, and fawned on her; she came to herself, and realized that it was time to return home.

She stood for a little, gazing with wet eyes at the dark

outline of the homestead; there slept her lover, never dreaming she was near. Surely, surely in some mysterious way he must feel that she was there, and come to her? Not to speak to her, no—that he should ever speak seemed to her like a thing so distant as to be almost unreal—an entering into paradise. But come he surely must—if only that they might see each other—that he might realize how she loved him.

But she must go. . . . With bowed head she turned in the direction of home. The long road was covered, she hardly knew how, and, without once waking to conscious thought of the way, she found herself in the house once more.

Silently she undressed; her head was aching, and it was long before she could sleep. At length she fell into a heavy slumber.

When she woke next morning it seemed as if the journey of the night had been a dream; she had to go out and convince herself that the lamb was really gone.

Once sure, however, she felt an indescribable joy—so near she had been to her heart's desire that night. And none to know of it but God. . . . She could not understand now why she had felt sad at parting with the lamb; the night stood out now like a gleam of brightness in her life.

One of her garters was missing—she could not remember what she had done with it. Fallen off somewhere, perhaps, and lying out on the road. It would be hopeless to try and find it now, though, among all the rocks; she might as well give it up for lost.

But it was a pity, for it was a nice one, neatly embroidered, and with her name worked on so prettily. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

WHILE Bagga was thus busy with her daydreams, Guest the One-eyed was deep in earnest talk with her mother, who confided to him the story of her life—the story of her heart.

She was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, and had been married against her will, though with no great resistance on her part, to the son of a rich landowner. The man she really loved was a young labourer on her father's place. No one knew of it, and the man himself had but a vague idea; she could not say if he returned the feeling or not. After some six months of married life, Fate—or the well-laid plans of her lover himself—brought him to work on her husband's farm. And now began a time of sore trial for her. The young man had become aware of her inclination, and made his advances boldly. So successfully did he play the part of broken-hearted lover that she fell a victim to his persuasion. So much Guest the One-eyed was able to gather from the widow's own confession; she did not spare herself in the recital.

She had already borne a son—her husband's child. Immediately after having given way to her lover, she had endeavoured to persuade him to go with her, take her away from the place; she could not stay with her husband as things were. But the lover was quite content to leave all as it was; indeed, it was evident that he preferred to have her there. Then she saw through him, realized the true nature of his feelings towards her, and confessed everything to her husband. The latter had, after a violent scene, at last agreed to forgive her, and treated her kindly. But she was determined to leave him, and went off to live alone, making no claim on him or on her father for her subsistence.

It was nineteen years ago now. At first, she had earned her living where and how she could—cleaning fish or washing wool. Then the child came, and she found it impossible to obtain work anywhere. Finally, she had settled down at Borg, where she had stayed three years. In spite of the kindness with which she was treated by Ormarr and Runa, however, she found herself regarded with suspicion. With her small savings, and some help from Ormarr, she had just been able to rent and stock her little holding, and had lived there now with her daughter for nearly fourteen years.

Now, life was pleasant enough, she said. And Guest the One-eyed understood that she had grown so accustomed to hard work and scanty fare that she would have found it hard now to change to another mode of life. But she looked to her daughter's upbringing with motherly care, and her great anxiety was the girl's future. How would it be with her when she went out into the world? Would she be able to live down her mother's past? Would God in His mercy spare her the consequences of her mother's sin?

That it was a sin she understood now; now, for the first time, she realized how unpardonable her act had been. The consequences might yet be visited upon her child. And her conscience made her suffer; she feared at times that the agony of her remorse would drive her to madness. She was on the edge of an abyss; only by the utmost effort could she preserve her self-control.

Guest the One-eyed had heard many secrets; listened to the story of many lives. And in his long years of life he had learned to sift the facts of a case, to find out truth as much from what was left unspoken as from what was said. The widow's life stood out clearly to his mind's eye in all its detail.

They sat in silence for a while.

"And the girl's father," asked Guest at last—"is he still living near?"

"No," answered the widow, and her lips tightened. "He went away across the seas soon after I left the place. Afraid,

maybe, that there might be trouble, and thought it best to be out of the way."

Again there was a pause.

Then said Guest the One-eyed quietly, "You are troubled at heart by the thought that the sins of the fathers are to be visited upon the children. Do not let that weigh too heavily upon you now. There are those who suffer so deeply for their own sins that they atone for them in life, and more. You are one of these. I am not speaking empty words to you for comfort's sake, but the truth. You can trust me. God has granted me the power to give my fellow-men in need the knowledge of remission of their sins, as far as may be in knowledge of the truth. I have sinned, and my debt is not yet paid—but my sin was greater than yours or that of any other I have met. But the Lord God is merciful, and I believe that He will grant me peace at last. At last, in death. And when that comes, I can say with truth that my life, by God's grace, has been a happy one."

The woman looked at him, with the same dull hopelessness in her eyes.

"How can you know that I have sufficiently atoned for my sin—you, who have known me only since yesterday, and heard no more than I have told you?"

Guest the One-eyed smiled, and a strange look of far-seeing wisdom lit up his heavy face.

"I believe that the Lord has sent me to you for your comfort in need—that the Lord has given me, and to no other, a sign to make you sure. I am no prophet, and I do not profess to tell what will or will not come. But—shall I tell you a secret? Promise me, first, that you will not act in any way to bring about that which shall come in God's good time."

The woman grasped his hand and nodded. Her eyes were fixed intently on his face, as if striving to read his words ere they were spoken.

"Your daughter will be the happiest woman in this land. She is loved by the purest soul I have ever looked into through human eyes." He turned away for a moment, and murmured, as if to himself: "I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy great mercy."

Then, addressing the widow again, he went on: "And she, on her part, returns his love with all her innocent heart."

The woman's face darkened.

"Impossible," she said. "There is no young man she knows here at all. I do not believe she has ever spoken to one."

"Remember your promise, and trust me now. The girl is in her heart—and in the book of Fate—betrothed and wedded to the one I speak of. Give time, and see."

"If I could believe you now. . . ."

"You can—you must. It is long since these lips framed a lie—never in the life of Guest the One-eyed have they spoken falsely."

The widow looked at him earnestly, doubt and hope struggling in her mind. Guest the One-eyed leaned towards her, his face deathly pale, and whispered:

"He of whom I speak—he, too, was born as the fruit of a sin—but a sin that is, or will be soon, I trust, atoned for."

The woman was weeping now, but they were tears of relief rather than despair. "I cannot fathom it all," she murmured. "But I believe you."

Guest the One-eyed smiled sadly, and cast a grateful glance to heaven.

Later in the day, Guest the One-eyed became feverish, and the pain in his shoulder became acute. He could not hide the fact that he was suffering, and the widow wished him to go to bed at once and remain there for the present. But he obstinately refused even to stay in the house.

"I have farther yet to go," he said, with his sad, kindly smile.

As he was leaving, he asked suddenly:

"Was there not once a priest here, Sera Ketill?"

The widow looked up at him in surprise. Then she cast down her eyes and frowned.

"His name is accursed in this house," she said—"as are all those who have deceived under the mask of love."

The man paled at her words. For a moment he seemed stunned. Then, taking up his sack and staff, he limped from the room.

The woman hurried after him.

"Are you ill?" she asked.

"No. I am going now."

"But—you have not said good-bye!"

"Forgive me," said Guest the One-eyed. "But you have said that which struck me to the heart."

The woman looked at him blankly. Then, giving up all attempt at finding out the mystery, she asked:

"Will you not leave some good word after you?—some word to help?"

Guest the One-eyed looked at her. Then he said:

"Let your heart be open to Love and closed to Hatred; and let your lips be quick to bless, but slow to curse."

"God be with you," said the woman, her voice quivering on the verge of tears. "God's blessing go with you where you may go."

And, turning hurriedly to hide her shame and emotion, she re-entered the house.

Guest the One-eyed limped painfully along beside the stream. Suddenly he remembered the girl, whom he had forgotten in the trouble of his soul, and turned to seek her. But at that moment she came running towards him.

The girl stopped, breathless, and looked at him reproachfully. "Would you have gone without a word to me?" she asked.

"I had just remembered," he said softly. "But for a moment my soul was not my own."

She took his sack and put her arm in his.

"I will go with you as far as I may," she said.

CHAPTER IX

A CALM, sunny day. The old man trudged along the valley, leaning on the girl's arm. Her golden hair and his white locks shone like haloes round their heads.

Now and again a flock of ptarmigan rose at their feet. Already the birds had shed their brown plumage and donned their winter coats of white.

It seemed as if summer were loth to bid farewell. The sea was calm, and the river flowed smoothly on its way; the lakes lay still as mirrors, reflecting the hills around and the blue sky above. No sound was heard from the homesteads but the occasional neigh of a horse or the barking of a dog. Even the rocks seemed less bleak and bare than usual, lapped as they were now in the warm rays of the sun. All seemed intent on looking its best at the last—the last it might be, for another day might bring cold winds and wintry gales, ushering in snow and ice.

The old man and the girl had gone some distance on their way when they came to a grassy slope that seemed inviting them to rest and look out over the scene. Somewhat shyly, the girl took out a packet of food and offered him.

"Now, that is your breakfast you have packed up here," said the old man as he opened it.

"I am not hungry," said the girl bravely, but the effort was plain to be seen.

Guest the One-eyed stroked her head and began to eat; he succeeded, however, in persuading her to share with him.

When they had finished, he asked her:

"Will you not turn back now? It is a long way home already."

She looked at him pleadingly. "Oh, I will run all the way

home. I am never tired—and I should like to see you within sight of the next homestead.”

“I am glad to have you—but we had better go on. We must not lose more time sitting here.”

He made no motion to rise, however, and for a while they sat in silence. Then he asked:

“Did you ever hear of one Sera Ketill, once priest of this parish, many years ago?”

The girl burst into tears, and sat crying quietly. He put no further question, but after a little said quietly:

“Have I hurt you, child? I would not have done that.”

“That—that was his father,” she answered, sobbing. “Did you not know?”

“Yes, I knew,” he answered.

“And they all say unkind things and hate him,” she went on, still sobbing passionately. “He drowned himself because he had been so wicked he couldn’t bear it—all the sorrow that came after. Threw himself over the cliff, they say; he was seen there the night after his father died in the church.

“And he left a will giving all he had to the poor, but they say it was only to make them sorry for the hard things they had said, and pray for his soul. And they never would forgive him, and they say the Evil One has taken him, because the body was never found. Isn’t it cruel! And all that was twenty years ago, and all that time no one has ever thought kindly of him once—only me, and I couldn’t help it. His father . . . I don’t know if *he* ever thinks of him. And yet he must, since it was his father . . .”

Gradually the girl became more composed. Her companion sat quietly, with tears in his eyes.

Suddenly she raised her tear-stained face towards him and asked:

“Do you hate him, too?”

Guest the One-eyed looked her straight in the face as he answered:

“For twenty years my life has been spent in seeking God’s mercy and forgiveness towards him.”

The girl's eyes lit with pleasure.

"Then you knew him? And were you fond of him?"

The man was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"Sera Ketill is not dead."

"Oh, thank God for that! Is it really true?"

"God bless you, child, that you are glad to hear it. Yes, it is true. He is yet a wanderer on earth, and penitent."

"Is he very far away? Shall I ever see him?"

"Not very far away. But ask no more just now."

They walked on until a fertile valley lay before them.

Close by was a small farm; other homesteads were scattered about not far off.

The old man slung his sack over his shoulder.

"Shall I never see you again?" asked the girl, her eyes filling with tears.

"You like me, then?"

"I love you. Every one loves and blesses you. If I had a father, I should wish him to be like you."

"But—I am only a beggar."

"There is no shame in that," answered the girl in surprise, "for one like you."

"Shall I bring Sera Ketill your greeting if I see him?"

"Yes, and tell him that I pray for him always."

"Do you think you can get home now before dark?"

"Yes, indeed; I am not tired at all now. Good-bye." And she gave him her hand.

"Good-bye," he said, "and God be with you."

The girl hurried off in the direction of home, and Guest the One-eyed turned towards the farm.

CHAPTER X

ON the morning after Bagga's expedition with the lamb, Ormarr was up and about before any of the others at Borg.

It was his custom to rise early. His nights were often restless, and it was only after he had been up and out a little that he felt refreshed. The work drove sad thoughts from his mind.

He was not happy, though he would have found it hard to say what was wrong. He could not honestly declare that he regretted having given up the path of fame that once had stood open to him through his music.

In the old days, whenever he had touched his violin, the contrast between the harmony of music and the discord of the world as it was had wrought on him so strongly that he had been driven to seek solitude. His sensitive soul craved rest, quivering as it did under the harshness of reality. It was not the desire for appreciation of his art, but the longing for harmony in life that he felt most deeply.

Here, on the farm, existence was rendered tolerable by the fact that he had to be constantly at work; the management of the estate gave him much to do, in addition to which the affairs of the parish were almost wholly entrusted to his care. And the affection and respect of his people, which he could not but perceive, served largely to aid him in the constant struggle within.

The people loved him, not only because he helped them in every possible way, and never refused his aid and counsel, but also because they felt that in him they had a true leader. They saw the firmness of character, the stern will, which he exercised in his own life, and it gave them courage.

Ormarr invariably began the day by a visit of inspection

round the farm to see that all was in order. The animals allowed to go loose about the place were carefully looked to each morning to see that they had come to no harm during the night.

One of the first things to catch his eye this morning was Ørlygur's lamb. He noticed the black head at once, and as he approached, the animal rose up, bleating pitifully. Evidently it was in distress about something. As soon as he had caught it, he noticed the blue ribbon at its neck, looked at it, and found the name "Snebiorg" woven in red letters. He was about to take it off, but changed his mind and let the lamb go. There were not two women of that name in the parish. And the lamb had got into the enclosure during the night, though the gate was fastened. Ormarr was not quite clear in his own mind as to what had happened, but at any rate, if the ribbon were intended for any one, it was not for him.

He thought it over for a while, and then went into the house to wake Ørlygur.

"Your lamb has come back. You will find it outside."

Ørlygur was out of bed in an instant. His father hesitated, as if deliberating whether to say more, but after a moment's reflection left the room.

Ørlygur threw on his clothes and hurried out—there was the lamb, sure enough. But—it did not recognize him. Evidently, in the course of the summer, it had forgotten him.

The ribbon at its neck caught his eye at once, and he bent down to examine it. At first sight of the name he started in astonishment, and let go his hold. Then, catching the animal again, he took the ribbon from its neck with trembling fingers.

The lamb was let to run as it pleased; Ørlygur stood with the garter in his hand, stroking it softly. His heart beat fast, his head was giddy. Tears came to his eyes, and his thought was all confused, but there was a great joy at his heart.

He sat down on the wall of the enclosure; the sun was just rising. Never before had he seen such a glorious opening

to any day. The piece of ribbon in his hand made this day one beyond all others; it called him from his sleep to be king in a beautiful world.

He realized now that, though he had felt sure before, there had nevertheless been something lacking—and here it was. All was certain now. And the joyous possibilities of the future seemed unbounded. He sat there now for hours, deep in his dreams, twining the ribbon round his fingers, one after another—none must be forgotten—and at last round his neck.

Suddenly he started at the sight of his father approaching, and put away the ribbon hastily. He got up in some embarrassment; it occurred to him suddenly that Ormarr might perhaps have noticed the ribbon himself at first. The thought left him utterly at a loss.

Ormarr came up and sat down quietly, as if unaware of anything unusual.

“A fortunate thing about the lamb,” he said. “Coming back unharmed like that. All sorts of accidents might have happened to it.”

“Yes,” said Ørlygur, trying to speak calmly.

“Have you time to help me today with the mangers in the big stable?—or were you thinking of going somewhere else?”

Ørlygur felt suddenly that it was most urgent he should go somewhere else, though he had no clear idea as to where. There was something in Ormarr’s voice that seemed to suggest he was not expected to remain at home.

He did not answer at once. Ormarr sat waiting for an answer, but without impatience, as if realizing something of what was passing in the young man’s mind.

When Ørlygur spoke, it was with a calmness that surprised himself.

“Yes—I was going for a walk . . . over towards Bolli. I thought of giving the lamb—to the widow there. She would be glad of it, no doubt; then she could kill one of her own sheep instead.”

Ormarr apparently found nothing in this proposal beyond an ordinary act of charity; he simply said:

"Yes, give it to her. Or perhaps to her daughter. Then you may be sure it would be well looked after."

"That is true."

Ørlygur had now completely regained his composure, but was still somewhat at a loss to understand his foster-father's attitude in the matter.

"You can bring them greeting from me," said Ormarr, as he rose and walked away.

Ormarr was both glad and sorry. But he knew it was best not to let Ørlygur's love affairs become a matter of dissension between them. They of Borg had need to hold together well; he had made his sacrifice—all that remained now was to prepare his wife.

When Ørlygur arrived at Bolli, with the lamb trotting contentedly behind him, he found the widow outside the gate.

She looked at him, and then at the lamb. She had noticed that morning that it was missing, but had merely thought it had been found and taken away earlier in the day.

"Good morning," she said in answer to his greeting. "Your lamb seems loth to leave us."

Bagga had told her mother before that the lamb always came back every time she had essayed to drive it off with other stray sheep.

"It seems so," Ørlygur agreed. "Can I have a word with Snebiorg?" There was a lump in his throat; he could hardly speak the name.

"She is not at home just now. We had a stranger here last night, and she has gone out to see him a little on his way. How far, I do not know. Can you guess who the stranger was?"

"I think so. Guest the One-eyed, was it not?"

"Oh—then you knew he was here?"

"Yes. I was the first to meet him. When I left him yesterday he was on his way to you."

"Why did you not come with him, then, and fetch your lamb? When did you fetch it?"

"I did not fetch it at all."

"But—it was here last night, and this morning it was gone."

Suddenly Ørlygur understood what had happened. And he flushed at the thought.

"That may be so," he answered vaguely. He hardly knew what to say.

The widow looked at him, as if somewhat offended at his tone.

"Won't you come in and sit down for a while?"

"Thanks," said Ørlygur. And they went indoors.

He had never been inside the house before. The little room was furnished with two beds; he looked immediately at the one which was evidently Bagga's. Her hat hung on a nail at the head of the bed, her knife and fork were in a little rack close by. On a shelf lay her Bible and Prayer Book, with some other volumes. He dared not take them up to see what they were—they looked like collections of the Sagas. The bed was neatly made, and a knitted coverlet of many colours spread over.

He sat down on the other bed with a strange sense of being an intruder here. His thoughts were vague, but he was dimly conscious that the place was filled with the spirit and life of the girl herself. Here she lived; the little trifles in the room were things she daily touched.

The widow, entering behind him, invited him to sit on the other bed. He did so, feeling dazed, and seating himself uncomfortably on the very edge. The widow suggested that he need not be afraid of lying down if he were tired, but he declined the offer with some abruptness.

The woman sat knitting, and for a long time neither spoke, only glancing across at each other from time to time.

The widow was not altogether pleased with this visit. She was at a loss to think what Ørlygur à Borg could have to say to her daughter, but as he did not speak, she was not inclined to ask him. Also, she remembered her promise to Guest the One-eyed the day before.

They sat thus all day, exchanging only an occasional word.

Once the widow went out and made some coffee, which they drank in silence.

At length she remarked:

“You are very patient to wait so long.”

“Yes,” he replied.

A little later she brought him some food and a drink of milk. She herself had eaten her meal in the larder, as was her wont. While he ate, she sat with her knitting, glancing at her guest now and again.

“Bagga must soon be here.”

Ørlygur nodded.

The widow pointed to the bookshelf. “You might take a book, if you care to, and pass the time. You must be tired of waiting.”

“I am not tired of waiting,” said Ørlygur.

Dusk was falling when Bagga at last returned. As soon as her mother heard her footsteps outside, she rose and left the room. Ørlygur remained seated. Something was about to happen—something wonderful, incredible, beyond his control. He was to see her—hear her voice, perhaps—even speak to her himself. He felt unable to move. The thing must happen. And then—what then?

The widow exchanged a hasty greeting with her daughter, and told her that one was waiting to speak with her.

Bagga was overcome with confusion, a wave of warmth swept through her body, and her hands grew moist.

“Me—to speak with me—who is it, then?”

“Go in and see.”

The widow disappeared into the kitchen.

Bagga could hardly find strength to walk the few steps through into the room. When at length she entered and saw Ørlygur standing there, she stood and stared at him without a word. Ørlygur, too, was unable to speak.

She offered her hand, and he took it, but the greeting was equally awkward on both sides. At last Ørlygur plucked up courage to speak:

“Will you have my lamb?” he asked. “I have brought it with me.”

The girl smiled, but did not look up. "Thank you," she said simply.

For a long time they stood facing each other without a word, hardly daring to breathe. Ørlygur felt he had much to say, but could find no words. At last he offered his hand again.

"Good-bye," he said.

She took it hesitatingly, but this time their clasp was one of lingering affection. They stood breathing heavily; then suddenly she leaned forward with her forehead against his shoulder; her hot cheek touched his. For a moment he pressed her to him, and passed his hand caressingly over her hair.

With a sigh she slipped from his arms, pressed his hand once more, and turned away. Then quietly Ørlygur left the room.

He went out of the house without taking leave of the widow. The latter, returning a little later to the room, asked if he had gone.

"Yes," said the girl.

"What did he come for?"

"He gave me his lamb."

"Nothing more?"

"Yes."

There was a long pause.

"Does he love you?"

Bagga turned her face away. "Yes," she whispered.

"And you love him too?"

The girl burst into tears. "Yes, mother."

The widow took her daughter in her arms. "God's blessing, my child. No need to be sorry for that. By the look of him, he is not one to change."

CHAPTER XI

GUEST THE ONE-EYED felt both ill and tired when, after bidding farewell to Bagga, he limped up towards the farm.

An old man, evidently the master of the place, was busy with some men thatching a hayrick with slabs of turf. The turf lay rolled up and set in piles about on the ground, a couple of hundred rolls, perhaps, in all. It had been a laborious task to cut the pieces thin and even at the edge; the strips were about ten feet long. Two men were busy on the stack, preparing it for the roof, the highest point carefully set so as to give an even slope on all sides. Others were lifting the rolls, taking great care to avoid a break. The farmer himself did but little of the work, being chiefly occupied with looking on and giving orders.

The arrival of a stranger caused a momentary pause in the work. Those on the ground gathered round him, and the two men on the stack leaned over to see.

"Who are you?" asked the farmer curtly.

"A beggar," answered the newcomer, seating himself on one of the rolls of turf.

"I thought as much," grumbled the man. "Can't you sit on the ground, instead of spoiling my turf?" And, turning angrily to the men, he shouted:

"Well, what is there to stare at? Get to your work."

Guest the One-eyed sat down, and for a while was left to himself. A dog came trotting up, sniffed at him, and curled up dog-fashion at his feet, apparently satisfied of being in decent company.

At length the farmer turned to him again.

"Well, old Greybeard, what news from anywhere?"

"There's little news I can tell."

"I daresay. All you think of is the meals you get—in other folks' kitchens."

"There's many things a man can think of. Will you give me shelter for the night?"

"I've no beds for lazy vagabonds. But you can sleep in the barn if you like, though I warn you it's draughty. I take it you can do some tricks or tell a story or something in return?"

Guest the One-eyed smiled and, looking up at him, said:

"Have you ever heard the story of the rich man and Lazarus?"

The farmer turned pale with rage. "You cursed bundle of rags!" he shouted. "You dare . . . I'll have you taken up before the sheriff for begging if you don't mind your words!"

The men looking on smiled. The local authority was Ormarr à Borg, and all knew there would be little gained by an angry man who came to him demanding the punishment of some poor wanderer for begging. It would, indeed, be about the best thing that could happen to the culprit himself.

"What is your name?" demanded the farmer, striding towards him with a threatening mien.

"I am called Guest the One-eyed," answered the old man, with his quiet smile.

The farmer was taken aback. "Guest the One-eyed! Impossible. He never comes this way. Guest the One-eyed. . . ."

He looked at the beggar again, shifted his feet, and stood in some confusion. "God's blessing," he stammered out at last. "Forgive me—I did not know. Come—come up to the house with me."

And clumsily he helped the wanderer to rise; his hands were little used to helping others.

"Let me take your sack," he said.

"Nay—a beggar carries his own," answered Guest the One-eyed, and hoisted it on his back. Then suddenly he smiled and, swinging down the sack once more, handed it to the farmer, who took it as if it were a favour granted him.

Guest the One-eyed glanced at him mischievously.

" 'Tis strange to see you with a beggar's pouch. None would have thought you could ever come to that."

The farmer cast a sidelong glance at his men, and was about to make an angry retort, but restrained himself and gave a forced laugh. Then he said:

"If I were to fill the sack with more than you could carry—what then?"

"Then I should let it lie."

The farmer was evidently anxious to make much of his visitor; the latter, however, seemed to care little for his hospitality, and would not even accept the bed that was offered him. The farmer assured him that it was a bed reserved for personages of distinction; bishops and high officials had lain in it. But Guest the One-eyed preferred to sleep in the barn, and all that the farmer could do was to have the cracks in the walls stopped as far as possible, and a fresh layer of hay laid over the rotting stuff that strewed the floor.

Before retiring, the beggar brought up the subject of Sera Ketill.

"That scoundrel!" cried the farmer angrily. "Ay, a scoundrel he was." And a murmur from those around showed that he had voiced the general feeling. "He duped them all. Not a man but was on his side. I remember him, and his lying sermons and his talk—and I was no wiser than the rest, to doubt my old friend. Ørlygur à Borg, he was a true man, and Sera Ketill that killed him—his own father . . . I shan't forget! And his poor wife, the Danish Lady at Hof—ruined for life. Twenty years now she's lived at Borg, and never got back to sense nor wit. 'Tis a comfort to think he'll suffer for it all, or there's no justice in heaven. The Devil must have marked him from the first—and took and kept him, and best he should. If I met Sera Ketill at the gates of Paradise, I'd turn and go another way."

And the farmer laughed, pleased with his own wit and confident of his own salvation.

Guest the One-eyed had listened with pale face to the outburst of hatred and scorn. At last he rose heavily to his feet and said:

"It is time a weary man went to his rest."

The farmer went with him to the barn.

"If you will sleep here," he said. "Though why you should, with a fine bed waiting, I can't see."

" 'Tis best to seek a place that's not above one's deserts," said the other mildly. And he added, "Though, for some, it may be hard to find."

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Left to himself, the wanderer lay staring into the darkness. And his lips moved in an inaudible prayer.

"My God, my God—if only I might dare to hope for forgiveness at the last; only one gleam of Thy mercy to lighten my heart. I am weighed down with the burden of my sin, and long has been my penance, but what is all against the evil I have done? Yet I thank Thee, Lord, that I alone am let to suffer; that Thy wrath has not been visited on that innocent child."

During the night his fever increased. He could not sleep, and lay tossing uneasily from side to side, murmuring often to himself:

"Lord, I feel now that Death is near. Good that it comes at last, and yet I fear it. What will Death mean for me? Some hell more terrible than I have lived through all these years? Thy will be done! It will not be tonight, I think. Another day, and then . . . Death. . . . Lord, Thy will be done!"

He lapsed into a state of drowsy helplessness, murmuring still to himself:

"Lord, Lord . . . two children were granted me of Thy grace. And to the one was given Thy peace in death; the other has found happiness in life. . . . I thank Thee, Lord. . . ."

He lay bathed in perspiration; dust and fragments of hay clung to his face and hands.

"Two Women . . . Lord, forgive me. . . . Mercy, Lord. . . ."

He flung himself over on his side and hid his face.

"Father, how often have I sinned against Thee! And knowing my sin, yet hardening my heart. Even then I suffered, but I would not heed, and persevered in sin. Forgive me, Lord."

For a while he lay still, then turned again. He strove to raise himself, but his strength failed him, and, sinking back, he cried aloud:

"Forgive me, Lord—forgive me, Lord. . . ."

His words were lost in the darkness, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

He woke some hours later, exhausted and parched with thirst. But he could not rise to seek for water, and at length he sank into a restless, feverish sleep.

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Early next morning he was awakened by the entry of the farmer. At first he hardly realized where he was. He was ill, with a racking pain in his head. But he strove to appear as if nothing were amiss.

"Good morning," said the farmer. "And how do you feel today? Was it very draughty up here?"

"Good morning. I have slept well, and I thank you."

The farmer laughed at sight of his visitor's face, which was plastered with scraps of hay. "You've enough hay about you to feed a sheep through the winter," he said with a laugh.

Guest the One-eyed had risen. As he stepped out into the cold morning air, his teeth chattered audibly. "The sun is not up yet, it seems," he murmured.

Never before had he so longed for the rising of the sun. He stood now staring towards the east; it seemed to him a miracle that he should be suffered to see the sun rise once more.

"The blessed sun," he murmured to himself.

The sky showed a dull blue between hurrying banks of cloud. The farmer yawned, and observed carelessly, "It's cold in the mornings now. Come in; there will be coffee ready soon."

Guest the One-eyed went into the cowshed, washed himself at the drinking-trough, and dried his face and hands on his coat, the farmer watching him the while.

"You're one for cleanliness, I see," he said. "I never trouble to wash myself, these cold mornings."

The wanderer produced a piece of comb, and tidied his hair and beard; it was a matter of some difficulty to get rid of the scraps of hay.

"Why not stay here for the day and have a good rest?" suggested the farmer. And with a sly glance he added: "I daresay we can afford to give you a bite of food."

"I thank you. But I must go on."

"Ay, there's always haste with those that have nothing to do," said the farmer, with a touch of malice.

He walked down a little way with his guest, some of the farm hands accompanying them. The wanderer bade farewell to each in turn, and all answered with a blessing. Then they turned back, the farmer alone going on a few steps more.

"Have you not some good word to leave with me?" he asked a little awkwardly.

Guest the One-eyed looked at the man from head to foot; the burly fellow stood as timidly before him as a child that had done wrong.

"It would be well if you were oftener to take the beggar's bag upon your shoulders," he said. And, having shaken hands in parting, he walked away.

"God be with you," said the farmer, and stood for some moments watching the beggar as he limped along. For the first time in his life he began to feel that perhaps after all wealth and security were not the only things worth coveting. There were other things—other feelings than the sense of material gain or loss.

He walked back to the house somewhat humbled in mind, and, going into his room, sat down on the bed with his head bowed in his hands. For long hours he sat there, seemingly in thought. In the evening, he roused himself with a sigh, and went out to where the men were working. His tone seemed harsher than his wont as he ordered them about.

But Guest the One-eyed went on his way, shivering and muttering to himself:

“Haste—yes, for today. But tomorrow? Who knows? Who asks? What do we know of it all? Life . . . and mortals playing at joy and sorrow; a little life . . . a long life . . . playing at life . . . playing with others’ hearts and with our own. And thinking it all in earnest. And the end? The grave, the grave. Cold earth, dark earth, where the sun cannot reach, though its grace be spread all above. My God, my God, what are my thoughts? Not earnest? Is it not earnest, all our life? Lord, forgive me. Thoughts, thoughts that come and go—but not for long. Thoughts fearing to end, to die under the earth, and never reach to heaven. My soul—Lord God, where is my soul? Is there a soul that is mine? Lord, Lord, forgive me! This is the last day Thy grace allows me; the last day of life on earth, of life and the blessing of the sun for me; the last day granted me to feel joy in the light. Joy? But my days have been pain, pain. And yet there is joy. . . . The last day . . . Lord, here am I, Thy servant. Let Thy wrath be turned away from me, O Lord, and see my heart that repents, repents. Forgive me, Lord. . . .”

He crouched down beside a rock, and laid his head upon the stone.

“God in heaven, I can feel Thy presence. Or is it that God is far away? Is it mercy or God’s judgment that comes? Forgive me, Lord, if there can be forgiveness. . . . Thy will be done!”

He rose, and limped along his painful way.

CHAPTER XII

GUEST THE ONE-EYED wandered far that day. He felt that it was fated to be his last. Fever burned in his veins; fever in his soul. It seemed a painful task to end this life. And he was tormented by dread lest his sufferings should after all not suffice to atone for his sin.

Sun and rain and hail took turns to follow him on this the hardest of all his wandering days. Clouds and sheets of hail passed before the face of the sun, making strange shadows on the hillsides, the contrast being more pronounced where dark stretches of lava and the lighter hue of corn-fields alternated. One moment the sun's rays warmed him, the next he was stung by the sudden lash of hailstones in his face. It was a day of contest between the powers of sun and shadow—a giant's battle where summer and life were pitted against autumn and death. And the earth over which it raged was marked by each in turn.

His beggar's staff changed constantly from a dry, gleaming white to a dripping grey. He swung it at each step, as it were a distorted extra limb. And the figure of the man standing against the changing background of the sky seemed hardly human; more like some fantastic creation of Nature herself.

And this man's soul, maybe, was rugged and misshapen as his body. But the soul of a man is not so easy to see. . . .

The first homestead he came to on this day's march was a little place. A peasant and his wife came out to meet the stranger, the rest of their people following. They were at home today, by reason of the weather, and had, moreover, expected his arrival. All the district knew by now that Guest the One-eyed had come amongst them. The

peasant and his household received him kindly, with many blessings. He felt their kindness without any need of words, and marked how they were glad to have him with them.

And talking with them, he spoke the name of Sera Ketill, once their priest, whom all remembered now with execration. Here, too, the tongues that had been ready with blessing for himself were quick to curse at the mention of that name; to their minds, Sera Ketill was a monster, a thing of dread. His very name made them shudder as if at the touch of some loathsome thing. He was a murderer, a hypocrite, and a cheat; they could not find in him the slightest link of charity and affection with his fellow-men. Even his death had been the act of a despicable creature, in that he had endeavoured to secure their regard by leaving all he had to the poor, and then flinging himself over the cliffs into the sea. This last was not even a fine thought of his own—a young poet had been the first to go that way, and by that very spot.

But the Devil had taken his body, and his soul, if any shired of soul he had, had doubtless gone with it. A thing of no use upon earth! He had not even had the courage to face the consequences of his acts. He was a stain upon mankind; in justice, he should have been burned at the stake before his soul went on its way to hell.

Guest the One-eyed listened pale as death to the bitter words. Strange, how a man's character could thus outlive him in the memory of his fellows. Twenty years had not sufficed to bring oblivion for the wrongs this man had done. His body might have been reduced to ashes in a moment, but the fire of hate burned still about his memory.

The wanderer looked at the faces of those about him—faces that one moment shone with kindly pleasure and the next glowed fiercely with hate. He could not but smile, though his heart was heavy. Poor mortals, poor unseeing men, seeing good and evil as things absolute, unalterable.

But while his thoughts were busy, his soul cried all the time to God, praying forgiveness. . . .

Thoughts within thoughts, and thoughts again.

For they were right, after all, these men. They themselves had the power of being good or evil, of loving or hating without reserve.

It was their hatred he was feeling now, fuel added to the furnace of his own remorse; he was passing through a purgatory of maledictions.

One moment he saw himself as Guest the One-eyed, beggar and wanderer—a figure clear enough. Then he was the doomed soul on the verge of death, doubting everything, doubting even his own doubt, torn asunder to his innermost being, a living cry of anguish seeking Heaven. And then, too, he was the penitent, believing and trusting in God—yet even so unable to wrench himself free from the spectres of doubt and mockery and scorn that clung to him.

Something prompted him to rise and speak to these his fellows gathered round him. There were many now; for folk had come from places near to see the man of whom they had heard so much. Yes, let them see him and judge him by what he had been and what he was now, and act as they were prompted to do. It was not enough that they received Guest the One-eyed with blessings, and cursed the name of Sera Ketill; he longed to bring both before them as one.

But the impulse reached no further than his thought.

As they cursed the man that he had been, he sat silent, with eyes cast down. He made no movement, only sighed. Then at last he rose, and stood a moment trying to collect his thoughts.

"I must go," he said. "I have a long way before me to-day."

And he bade farewell to each in turn, confused thoughts passing through his mind the while.

"They give me their hands—but I am stealing what they give. If they knew me, they would spit on me. Stone me, perhaps. Would they, I wonder—would they do so now? But I steal what they give because I need it; it is because I must. Soon my hand will be cold, and then my soul will have no link with any other soul—no way to feel their love

and innocent kindness. Yes, I must let them give me their hands—as many as I can. And after that, the grave. Lord, remember that this is my last day . . . the very last. But I will be patient . . . Lord, Thy will be done!”

And he went on his way, with blessings from all. The people stood silently watching him as he went; their hearts had been moved beyond their daily wont by the sight of this unhappy wanderer, and their thoughts followed him now in sympathy along his sorrowful way.

The wanderer's heart was suffering more than all. His soul ached with loneliness—he felt as if already he were confined within the cold walls of the grave. It seemed a marvel to him that he could endure this and live.

On and on he went, thinking—thinking. . . .

“If no man can forgive me, if no human heart can realize my atonement, can then God ever forgive? The blessings they have given me—can they ever outweigh the curses that were meant for me as well? Lord, if only one might cross my path to know me, and forgive. One who could take my hand and know and pardon all. . . . Lord, Thy will be done. . . .”

He was taking the road towards the trading station. On the way he entered a house here and there, and was greeted kindly as ever. But at the mention of Sera Ketill's name, all who heard it had but curses; eyes that had looked on him in kindliness lit now with hatred of the man he named.

“I have done more evil even than I thought,” he muttered to himself as he went on his way, refusing those who would have shared the road. “To have planted so much hatred in all their hearts; to be the cause of all those evil thoughts beyond my own; things grown in the dark from evil seed of my sowing. Lord, who shall ever tear them up and destroy them that they may not rise again? Lord, can it be that the fruits of sin never cease, when good comes to an end at last? Lord, Lord, now I see the greatness of my sin—more than I had dreamed. And now I am come to the verge of death and have no strength even to

suffer more. Only Thy mercy, Lord—grant me Thy mercy, that hast denied me the forgiveness of men.”

The trading station had grown considerably in the twenty years that had passed. There were many new houses in the place. And the wanderer looked in vain for the turf huts that had formed the outskirts of the settlement when he knew it. They were gone, and modern buildings stood where they had been.

He limped from door to door, bearing with him each time blessings for Guest the One-eyed and curses for the name of Sera Ketill. At the last house, he asked:

“Where do the poor live now?”

There was still a glimmer of hope in his heart that there, among the poorest, he might find one single heart to bless Ketill the priest for what he had given.

“There are no poor here now,” was the reply.

“Are all in Hofsfjordur grown rich?”

“There is a poor widow living out at Bolli, a lonely place at the foot of the hills. But ’tis her own fault that she lives as poorly as she does. She might have taken the help that was offered her. But it was the Devil Priest’s money, and she would not take it.”

“The Devil Priest?”

“Sera Ketill was his name. But we call him the Devil Priest.”

“Good-bye,” said Guest the One-eyed.

“Peace go with you.”

On his way out from the trading station, he passed by a shed from which came the sound of voices within. The door stood half-open, and, looking in, he saw in the half-dark four strange figures—three men and a woman, ragged and wild-looking; evidently these were vagabonds like himself.

The woman was shouting a ribald song; one of the men sat crouched on the floor rocking with laughter. The other two men were fighting, the stronger chuckling at each suc-

cessful blow, while the other fought in silence, waiting his chance.

The man on the floor called out to the others with an oath to come and listen. "Give over, you fools, and come and hear. 'Tis a new song—one of Gudda's best. Ay, Gudda, she can make a song, if she's not as young as she used to be. . . ." And he came shambling over towards them.

He was a tall fellow, bigger than either of his two companions, still young, with reddish-yellow hair and a pasty face. The two sprang away as he came up.

"Mind your own business, Luse-Grimur!" cried the one nearest. This was a dark man of slender build, known as the Bishop, from a way he had of mimicking the tones of a priest, and repeating fragments of an indecent parody of the marriage service whenever a couple came together. "Keep away, and don't bring your lice near me."

"You'll have my hands nearer than you care for in a minute," answered Grimur, with a leer. "Go on, Gudda."

Gudda was known for her talent in making songs. She was a powerfully built woman getting on in years, with a coarse voice in keeping with her coarse face and heavy build. Her skirt reached hardly below her knees, showing a pair of muscular legs; her stockings were of rough material, and clumsily darned. One redeeming feature she had—her large blue eyes. Children feared her until she looked them full in the face, when the glance of her eyes seemed to draw them to her.

She was one of the few women vagabonds in the country, and was known far and wide for her vulgar songs.

Looking towards the door, she caught sight of the stranger, and called to him to come in. Guest the One-eyed limped over to the group.

"God's peace," he said as he entered.

"God's peace with you," returned the others, somewhat abashed.

Suddenly the youngest of the party stepped forward. This was Jon Gislason, a short, thick-set fellow who had some claim to good repute, being known to work at times, and trusted

to carry letters and parcels from place to place. He strode up to the newcomer, and looked him in the face.

"He's one of our sort," he said. "It is Guest the One-eyed."

There was a shout of welcome at this, and Grimur took out a flask from his pocket.

"Best corn brandy," he declared, handing the bottle to Guest. "Good stuff, you can take my word for it." Then, in a slightly altered tone, he went on: "I daresay, now, you think us rather a rough lot, you being more gentle like. But it's just our way. Rap out an oath without thinking like."

"'Tis not such words that do the worst of harm," said Guest the One-eyed. And he took a sip from the flask.

Then with a grimace he spat it out. "I thought it might do me good," he said. "But I can't swallow it, all the same."

"Oh, you swine!" shouted Grimur as he saw the precious liquid wasted. "There, I'm sorry," he went on. "That's no way to speak to a godly man. But the stuff's too good to waste. Leastways, to my thinking."

Guest the One-eyed offered his hand.

"No harm, brother," he said. "Each to his own ways."

"'Brother,'" repeated Grimur thickly. "Calls me brother—shakes hands. Nobody ever called me brother before. My own folk won't touch me, call me Luse-Grimur, and keep far out of reach of vermin. Ay, it's true enough what they say of you, Guest One-eyed. God's blessing, man."

"We'll have Grimur drowning his lice in floods of tears," grumbled the Bishop. "See them swimming around and saying their prayers, Amen!"

"You, Bishop," said Grimur warningly—"well for you this good man's here. If it weren't for him, I'd send you swimming and saying your prayers in earnest for less than you've said."

"Filthy beast," said Gudda scornfully, and spat at the Bishop, who only laughed.

Guest the One-eyed turned to him with a keen glance.

"Have you ever thought," he said quietly, "that one day must be your last—that your tongue may be silent for ever after any word you have spoken?"

"Ho, yes. And I've got it all ready what I'm going to say. When I get to the Gates of Heaven—if the Devil hasn't pinched my soul all hot on the way—I'll say to the Lord: 'Here you are; Behold the Son of Man!' That's my words."

"You also are my brother," said Guest the One-eyed. And he held out his hand.

The Bishop spat in it.

Guest the One-eyed stood silent gazing at his extended hand. Then he sat down and sobbed.

The Bishop's laugh of derision died away. He stood for a moment breathing heavily, then slunk out of the shed and went away.

The other three stood silently watching, afraid to look at each other, uncertain what to do.

After a little Guest the One-eyed regained his self-control, and, looking up at them, he said quietly:

"Friends, do not hate him; believe that he is not worse than others. Only, the way to his heart is longer and harder to find."

"I have far to go," he said, after a pause. "Good-bye."

"God's blessing," murmured the others as he left.

He stood for a moment outside the shed, uncertain which way to turn. He would have liked to go to Hof, to the vicarage on the other side of the fjord, but it was too far to walk. This was his last day, and already a good part of it was gone; though he had lost no time.

He hobbled down to the beach to see if there might chance to be a boat going across. Just as he neared the slope, he perceived a little group of people gathered round something he could not see. Close by, a small rowing-boat was drawn up on the sand. Going closer, he saw a man bending over a heap of clothes. Presently the man rose up, and said:

"He is dead"

Those near bared their heads and made the sign of the cross.

Guest the One-eyed needed but a glance at the ragged heap to recognize it—it was the body of the Bishop.

“And only a moment since I was with him,” he said.

“We were too late,” said a fisherman. “Saw him throw himself into the sea, and hurried after. But he held on to some weed down below—look, there’s some of it in his hand still.”

And, true enough, the dead hand clutched a tangle of weed.

“So he is gone already to stand before the Lord,” he murmured. “Poor soul—God grant him peace.” And he made the sign of the cross above the body.

The men were running the boat out. He went up to them and asked:

“Are there many going across?”

“Only myself,” answered a young man. “I am working at the vicarage, and going back there now.”

“Will you take me with you to the other side of the fjord?”

“Gladly,” answered the young man, and flushed with pleasure.

The day was fine now, but clouds were racing across the sky. Rain and hail had ceased, only the shadows of the clouds darkened the water as they passed.

Guest the One-eyed sat still, gazing around him as the boat shot out into the fjord. His eyes took in the landscape; there, nestling in the valley, lay the homestead of Borg.

The sight of it moved him; this was the place that had been his home. Strange to think of it now. There his infant limbs had learned to walk, and thither he turned now, for the last steps on his road of life.

He was roused from his meditations by the youth, who nodded over towards a steep cliff rising from the water.

“That was where Sera Ketill killed himself,” he said.

“You’ve heard of Sera Ketill?”

“Yes. I knew him. Better, perhaps, than many did.”

“A monster of wickedness he must have been,” said the young man, as if inviting the other to tell what he knew.

For the moment, Guest the One-eyed was dull to the pain

which condemnation of Sera Ketill usually caused him. He was about to answer absently, "Judge not . . ." but checked himself and sat gazing vacantly across the water.

"I never thought to sail on the sea again," he said, as if to himself.

"Again?"

"Yes. I have sailed far in my time, and seen many lands." The young man seemed to take this as a jest.

"You mean in thought, I take it?" he suggested.

Guest the One-eyed looked at him. "You are not without sense," he remarked. "Do you travel in thought yourself?"

The young man laughed, and shook his head. "Not much. But I am going to America this winter."

"Do not do that," said the other quietly.

"Why not? There is good money to be made there."

"True. But it is easiest to die in the place where one was born."

"I have not thought of dying just yet."

"Maybe not. But life leads only to death. Death is the only thing we can be certain of gaining; perhaps the only gain."

"I had heard that Guest the One-eyed preached the Gospel of Life," said the young man seriously.

"And you are disappointed to find that Guest the One-eyed is only human after all?"

The young man did not reply, and they went on in silence. They were more than half-way across the fjord by now. Guest the One-eyed sat thinking of the strange currents beneath the smooth surface, and the marvels of life in the hidden depths. All seemed incomprehensible; the sea, the life of man—they were much alike. Human existence was merciless, restless, as the restless tossing of the waves.

It was a relief to step out of the boat and tread good earth again; for a moment his mission was forgotten.

But the sight of the churchyard brought it once more to his mind. He passed through the gateway. The church was new—a more imposing edifice than the old one. Bright in

colour, and clean and pleasant in appearance—as he looked, memories of the old, dark, forbidding little place rose to his mind.

At the entrance door the old stone steps remained. He knelt down upon them, and pressed his forehead against the stone. Then he rose, and went to the burial-place of Borg. He found the stone he was seeking, and laid himself down beside it in silent prayer.

When at last he rose, he was so weak that he could hardly drag himself along. He would not enter the vicarage, however, though he needed rest and food. Passing on, he took a narrow, unfrequented path down towards the valley.

The man who had rowed him over had at once told the household that Guest the One-eyed was come, and had gone into the churchyard. Soon, as he did not appear, they went out to look for him, searching in every corner where a man might be. But Guest the One-eyed was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XIII

KEEPING to the side track for some time, Guest the One-eyed made his way down from the vicarage lands unobserved, but soon turned off across the hills towards the main road. Step by step he dragged himself towards his home, shivering in fever, weary and exhausted, leaving the rest to God.

The journey must be made; this road he must travel to the end, no matter what greeting he might find. Curses only, it might be; a death without a single kindly word. But his way to death lay through Borg—and he was nearing the end of it now.

Home to Borg! home to Borg! home to Borg! The words beat in his blood like a promise of release, his heart sobbed with joy, and a new hope filled him, driving all doubt away. Peace and forgiveness were near.

Home to Borg! home to Borg! home to Borg! All was brighter now; a childlike happiness came over him. He had sinned and fled, fearing his punishment; now he was returning home to be forgiven.

He made such speed as he could, despite his waning strength. Homeward! homeward!

Rain and hail began to fall once more, but he did not heed. His mind was full of the thought that he was nearing a kindly end, a peaceful passing into eternal rest.

Home to Borg! home to Borg! home to Borg!

His feet stepped in time to the ring of the words, that sounded like sweetest music in the ears of the wearied pilgrim. Never before had there been such a welcome message for any on earth. Only a bruised and tortured soul could feel the joy of it: home to Borg! home to Borg!

Great is the glory of the sun that brings delight, of the

spring that fills the world with sweetness, but nothing to the wonder of returning home after years of struggle, years of suffering in body and soul, to die among those one loves, those who will forgive.

Home to Borg! home to Borg! home to Borg!

. . . Only the stream to cross now . . . only the little slope to climb . . . only a few steps more . . .

CHAPTER XIV

THE household at Borg were all within doors. There was no working outside on such a day. The sheep had to be looked to now and again. During the storms they took shelter where they could, but these once past, they scattered about to graze once more.

Ormarr had set his men to work repairing stables and cow-sheds, taking a part himself in what had to be done. But there was no such pressing haste; the hands went to their work with gossiping and laughter, telling stories of all sorts, from gruesome ghost-tales to amusing anecdotes from near and far. There was hardly work enough for all. And the wild weather out of doors made it more cheerful to be within.

Ormarr and Ørlygur took no part in the general gaiety. It was not their way to be gloomy, but no one seemed to notice that today they kept, as it were, somewhat aloof. The masters might well have something that occupied their minds, for the moment, as might any one else. And no one thought anything of their silence, least of all attempting to intrude on their reserve.

As a matter of fact, neither Ormarr nor Ørlygur was in the slightest degree depressed, but each had that in his mind which claimed his attention beyond all else.

Ørlygur could not forget his visit to Bolli the day before. Time and again the various impressions of what had passed recurred to his mind—how he had sat waiting, how clean and tidy everything had been in the place. And the girl—every single movement of hers was fixed in his memory, even to the ever-restless little finger of her left hand. He repeated over and over again the words he had heard her speak; even the intonation was still fresh in his mind.

So deeply was he occupied with these recollections that he

found little thought for Guest the One-eyed, and yet he longed to see the old man again. He felt an ever-increasing desire to talk with him, and, in particular, to learn from a reliable source whether his father had really been so evil a man as was generally declared to be the case. Possibly Guest the One-eyed might be able to recount something at least to the credit of the former priest. Had there been anything good in him, Guest the One-eyed would surely have found it. And Ørlygur earnestly hoped that his father might prove to have been not altogether bad.

Ormarr was thinking of a dream he had had the night before. It was hardly any connected dream, only a sudden vision that had come while he slept. He had seen his father and Sera Ketill standing hand in hand at the foot of his bed. That was all. But Ormarr could not get the vision out of his mind, and was superstitious enough to attach some importance to it. The more he thought of it, the more he felt sure it must mean something—what, he could not say.

Was it that his father had wished to declare to him that he had forgiven Ketill, and no longer desired any feeling of enmity to exist between the brothers? It seemed the most reasonable explanation.

But how could his father ever expect him to forgive Ketill, after he had witnessed the terrible scene in the church, and all it had cost? Not only the life it had taken; there was also the tragedy of the poor woman who had dragged through twenty years of life a mental wreck. Ormarr had seen his brother denounce their father from the pulpit for the sin he, Ketill, had committed; the consequences of that sin had been left to Ormarr to mitigate as far as he could.

Ormarr himself had only known his brother as a boy. All the time he had been abroad they had never met, until the time when Ketill appeared in Copenhagen about to enter on his priesthood. And on that occasion, despite the claims of relationship, Ormarr had found it impossible to feel any real liking for him. Now, knowing as he did that even at that time the avowed servant of God had a sin upon his conscience of which he showed no sign, it was impossible to feel any

regard for him. Since then they had had no intercourse with each other, and it had never occurred to Ormarr that Ketill could ever feel himself unfairly treated in the apportionment either of material inheritance or of affection. Ormarr had never sought to probe the workings of his brother's mind, and had no idea of the way he schemed and wrought in secret. He had seen only the outward effect of action, knowing nothing of the inner cause, and all that he had seen had been evil. So evil, indeed, had Sera Ketill's actions been that they seemed to justify the name that had been given him—the Devil's Priest.

No. He searched his mind and heart, but could not find a single spark of kindly feeling towards his brother, much less affection. No matter how hard he tried to be impartial, he was forced to admit that the expression even of any other feeling than that of hatred would be falsehood. It was easy to say, "Forgive the dead," but—he still hated his brother and loathed his memory. The man was dead, and had already heard his judgment pronounced. Ormarr himself might die, but he felt that even on the point of death he could not feel otherwise than he did now.

Ketill had been evil all through; no act had been so mean but he could stoop to it, no redeeming feature could be found in all his doings. He had violated all the laws of love and kinship, and trampled all that was sacred underfoot. Lying and fraud had been his chosen weapons, and his methods were as foul as his soul. Forgive him? No—it was all beyond forgiveness.

To forgive him would be almost like becoming himself an accomplice in his brother's evil deeds; his soul would be tarnished by the mere toleration of such a memory.

The Devil's Priest had been his brother, blood of his parents' blood; it did not help him. It was impossible to forgive. It seemed natural and inevitable as the breath of life to curse him, hate him, and condemn him.

Even his death had been that of a coward—a fitting end. And the last attempt to win the hearts of the people after death by leaving his fortune to the poor—that, too, was a

meanness entirely in keeping with the rest. It had gained him nothing, after all, for the poor accepted his gifts, but reserved the right to curse him, all the same.

No—even though his father took Ketill by the hand, and led him forward to ask his brother's pardon, though the vision were to come a hundred times, night after night for the rest of his life—he could not forgive him.

Thus Ormarr thought, and his heart grew ever harder towards his brother. Later in the day, passing by Alma's window, he saw her sitting there, with eyes staring emptily out into space. And his indignation rose anew; he muttered between his teeth a curse on the name of the Devil's Priest.

The household were sitting down to the evening meal when Guest the One-eyed came crawling on hands and knees up the slope towards the house. Ørlygur, seeking solitude for the enjoyment of his thoughts and dreams, was the only one out of doors; he at once noticed the approaching figure, and hurried towards him, heartily glad at the meeting. He no longer felt awkward or shy, but promptly seized the beggar's sack to carry up to the house himself.

"I am glad you have come," he said, shaking hands warmly.

The old man stood up with difficulty; his legs were tottering under him. He looked earnestly at the young man with his solitary eye, evidently noting with satisfaction the unfeigned pleasure in his face.

His brain throbbed still to the words: Home to Borg! home to Borg! And he returned the young man's greeting in a voice hardly audible.

He had come home—and his son was glad to see him.

Then suddenly he realized that his son did not know him, and the thought dashed his gladness to the ground in a violent reaction.

Ørlygur took him by the arm, and led him through to the courtyard. They had nearly reached the house when Alma came out, leaning on old Kata's arm. Kata had seen him coming, and had brought her mistress out to meet him.

At sight of the two women, Guest the One-eyed all but fell. With an effort, Ørlygur led him to the big slab of stone that stood in the middle of the courtyard and could be used as a seat. The old man sank down on it, covering his face with his hands.

Ørlygur, alarmed at the old man's evident illness, hurried into the house to call his father.

Kata was in high spirits, and talked volubly to her mistress.

"I knew he would come; it was to be. Not a doubt of it but God has brought him here, at the end of his wanderings. Truly God is Almighty."

But the beggar sat on his stone, sobbing and murmuring brokenly:

"My God! my God!—this is my doing; I have put out the light of her soul. Those empty eyes! O God, a dreadful thing! And Thou hast willed it so, that I should see and understand there could be no forgiveness, for all my prayers no mercy. . . . Lord, Thy will be done!"

The two women came up to him; he raised his head and looked at them, with fear in his eyes.

The Danish Lady came nearer, and stroked his hair.

But old Kata took his hand, and said:

"Welcome now! God has forgiven you."

The man sat still, with a face of despair, the tears pouring down his cheeks.

"God can never forgive me," he said.

"He can," said old Kata earnestly. "God can forgive all sins of all mankind. And you have borne His punishment with patience."

"I have borne His punishment, yes. And now there is only death."

The old woman's wrinkled face lit with a smile.

"Be glad of that," she said.

Guest the One-eyed sat drinking in the peace that flowed to him through the gentle touch of Alma's fingers as they stroked his hair. Old Kata watched him, and understood.

"See," she said, "she does not know—and yet she knows

enough. That is her way with all who she feels are good at heart and suffering. No other would she touch. And never has she come to any with such tenderness as now. Heaven bless her."

"Heaven bless her," repeated the broken man.

Just at that moment Ormarr came out from the house, Örlygur close behind him. The boy had whispered to his father that Guest the One-eyed had come, and was evidently ill. Ormarr had risen immediately and came striding out now with a friendly smile on his face.

The beggar rose to his feet, looked him in the face, and bowed his head. Ormarr stood rooted to the spot, and deathly pale. This old man, this wandering beggar, was his brother, the one-time priest—the Devil's Priest. And in a moment all the stories he had heard of him passed through Ormarr's mind—his wisdom, his unselfishness, his generosity and self-sacrifice. Ormarr saw the depth of his misery, how deeply he was crushed and humbled, body and soul. And he had seen Alma caressing him, thus placing him at once among the "good." And this living witness to Life's vengeance upon sin, with its merciless humiliation, wiped away all hatred from his heart. But a moment ago he had hated his brother; now all was changed. Ormarr sought down into the depths of his heart to see if any vestige of hate remained, but found none; all unkindliness was gone, and only pity and sympathy remained—yes, and love. Once more the vision of the night before rose to his eyes.

Swiftly he stepped towards the pitiful figure and raised him up; the two stood sobbing in each other's arms. Two sufferers under the heavy yoke of life; two creatures with whom life had played its pitiless game of love and hate; two brothers in strife and sorrow.

And when they had stood thus awhile, Ormarr kissed his brother and stroked his cheek, and said:

"Welcome home, brother."

And Ketill answered: "God bless you, Ormarr. I have come from our father's grave, and I felt in my heart that you would forgive me."

Ørlygur had been watching the scene with deep emotion. At first he saw in it nothing but an unusually hearty welcome on the part of Ormarr towards a wandering beggar. But gradually it became clear to him that it was more than this, and as their words revealed the truth, he stood half wondering if it could be real.

Then Ormarr turned to him and said:

“Ørlygur, it is your father.”

For a moment the young man stood still, his face twitching in the effort to control his feelings. Then he gave up and, sobbing openly, embraced the old man in his turn.

Here was a new joy, a thing undreamed of. From childhood he had believed his father dead, and in death remembered only with execration by all who had known him. And here was his father alive, a man whom all who knew him blessed. No longer any need to ask if it were not possible to find some little good in all his father's deeds; Guest the One-eyed was a man whose good deeds were told on every side. This was his father; one whom the whole country blessed and revered for his Christian spirit and unselfish life. A man who left with all some kindly memory of every meeting; one who knew better than all his fellows how to bring out the good in every man. However terribly he might have sinned, it had been more than atoned for in those twenty years of humility and self-sacrifice. Surely the life of Guest the One-eyed was enough to expiate all.

So Ørlygur thought, as he wept in his father's arms, and his heart trembled to think how wonderful were the ways of life.

Suddenly the old man shivered and sank down, unable to stand. They helped him to a seat on the stone, supporting him tenderly. His body shook with a convulsive fit of coughing; his mouth filled with blood, and he smiled as he saw what it was.

Ormarr and Ørlygur carried him into the house, Kata and Alma following behind.

As soon as they had laid him on the bed, Ormarr left the room, saying he would return directly.

He went into the large dining-room, where his wife was still busy with supper for the workers. A girl who was helping her left the room as he entered; Ormarr closed the door behind her.

Runa glanced at him, laid down the things she was holding, and sat down on a chest.

"What is it, Ormarr?" she asked in a low, anxious voice.

Ormarr opened his lips to speak, but could not. He took her hand and sat stroking her hair.

"This," he said at last. "Guest the One-eyed has come. And he is ill—very ill—I fear he is dying."

"Dying—oh, what can we do? What is it? Can we get a doctor to help?"

Runa had risen to her feet as she spoke, but something in Ormarr's look checked her, and she sat down again.

Ormarr's voice was hardly recognizable as he went on:

"There is more. Guest the One-eyed is . . . is my brother . . . Ketill. . . ."

"Ketill! Alive?"

Ormarr was silent.

"He lives," said Runa, as if to herself. "Thank God—thank God for that!"

"You—you are glad of that," said Ormarr eagerly. Then he turned away. "He is here," he went on, "and dying. I have forgiven him—and Alma . . . she was stroking his hair. . . ."

"Alma?" repeated Runa, deeply moved. "Oh . . . and that is Guest the One-eyed. No wonder that he never came here before."

Ormarr sat down beside his wife, then rose again. "Shall we . . . will you come and see him?" he said. "We have put him to bed in the little room."

"Yes," said Runa. "Do you think he will die?"

"I am afraid so."

"If only death may bring him peace. It has been a weary way for him."

They entered the room together. Ketill lay very still, and the others were careful not to disturb him. He opened

his eyes as they approached, and at sight of Runa he covered his face with his hands.

She bent over him, and kissed his forehead gently. Then, sitting down at the bedside, she said in a calm, soft voice:

“Look at me, Ketill.”

She laid her hands on his and said again:

“Look at me, Ketill. It is all forgiven.”

But he kept his face turned from her, and only muttered sadly:

“How could you ever forgive me?”

“Look at me, Ketill, and see.”

And he looked up into her eyes.

“It is true,” he said. “Love—only love and kindness there. You have forgiven me—thank you for that, Runa. Heaven bless you.”

He lay still for a while, and his breathing seemed easier. Then suddenly he raised his head and looked round.

“Nothing left now but to die,” he said. “I can see it is getting dark already. Let me see it to the end—the end of the day; the twilight and dear faces round me. I shall not see tomorrow.”

“Do not talk,” said Runa gently. “Do not tire yourself.”

“Let me talk,” he answered, with a smile. “My tongue will not have long to talk at all; it will last me the little that is left. Perhaps it might speak some little word that would live in memory—if only that might be. My friends, do not think I fear to die—that I would put it off a single second if I could. It would be good to live with you, but there is more than that to think of. Only death can make atonement complete—and blessed be death for that it does. Forgive me for my words—I would not hurt you, any one, or make light of your goodness—you, who have forgiven me. But it is true that only death can give me peace and forgiveness of all.”

He looked from one to another of those standing round.

“Friends—beautiful faces,” he went on. “And I can see the souls of all through your eyes, and all your thoughts. My heart bleeds for all the pain and sorrowing that I who

was Sera Ketill left to you. Even you, my son, young as you are, have found suffering already in life. Shall I tell you what I read in your eyes now? Sorrow—sorrow that you cannot feel all regret now that your father is to die. Do not grieve that I tell you, Ørlygur; your thoughts are the clean, good thoughts of a child, and I love them. There is more in your mind too. I know what it means to you to learn now that your father did not die as you thought—a suicide. But Sera Ketill died then, only a Guest on earth remained behind. And there is one thing more, that you yourself perhaps would not have said before so many—you are thinking of the girl you have chosen, and how she, too, will be glad to hear what you have learned today. Come here to me, Ørlygur, and take my blessing.”

Ørlygur rose, and the tears he had been trying bravely to repress flowed freely now. He fell on his knees beside the bed, and hid his face in the coverlet. The old man laid his hand on his son’s head.

“Best that it should be said,” he went on. “And you may be glad of your choice. Her heart is pure, as yours is. And she will be faithful—as you. Clean and pure in heart . . .”

He broke off, weeping.

“Clean and pure in heart,” he murmured brokenly. “Oh, that I had been so . . . that I had been . . .”

His voice was lost, and for some time he could not speak. Then with an effort he controlled himself, and spoke again:

“Nothing done can be undone. By the grace of God it may seem that wrong has been atoned for and forgiven. I do not know whether I have atoned for my sins, or whether they can ever be wiped out. Ormarr, you are wondering yourself now how it can be that the hatred of me that still glowed for a moment in your eyes when you found me before has vanished so suddenly. Shall I tell you why it was? It was because you saw and understood how I had suffered—suffered the pains of hell, more than a man can bear. And because you had suffered too. In suffering all hearts meet; more than all, when death and the ties of blood are there to

help. And you, Runa, you are thanking God that I am still alive, and that I have suffered as I have. Never a doubt in your heart but that God has forgiven me. And so you, too, have forgiven. Kata, you and I can read each other's thoughts; our thoughts are one. And though you know it before I speak, let me say it; it is you I have to thank most of all."

He was silent for a moment, turned over on his side, and went on:

"At the moment when it was in my mind to throw myself into the sea—I had thought to drown myself in my despair—I remembered you. I had often thought of you, and guessed something of the sorrow at your heart, though you never let it be seen. I knew your story—knew that one had deceived you, and that you could not forget. I saw how you went about as a blessing to others, though you suffered more than all the rest. And it seemed to me that perhaps your life was, after all, the greatest thing—greater than all else, to put self aside and live for others. And it was then I felt the desire to try if I could not wipe away my sin—try to spread blessings around me instead of despair. And so I fled away to a distant part, hiding at night and travelling by day. 'Guest' I called myself, and was the poorest of men, a beggar, a wanderer, living by the grace of God and man, eating with the dogs, and sleeping at night in barns or sheds among the cattle. And I had not wandered long before I found enough for me to do. Wherever I came, I found strife and malice and envy and misunderstanding among those who should have lived together in love. And I took upon me to work for reconciliation between my fellow-men—with one another, and with life and death. For men forget that life is but a speck in the vastness of space without end; that life comes from death and moves towards death in a narrow circle. And so they fight to the death, and seek to wound their fellows, ay, and strew poison in their wounds, forgetting that every hurt a man deals his fellow burns deepest in his own heart. With hands thirsting for blood and souls afire with hate they fight one against

another—as they had fought for generations. And the priests—the servants of God? Why do they not go out among the people, speaking to each, and trying to link the souls of all together in brotherly love? Instead of standing up like idols aloof in their pulpits, and delivering the word of God as an oracle. *That* is the only priesthood that is worthy of its name, the only way to show forth God's word so that it shall be felt and understood and live in the soul itself. I could have won many a man to leave his home and follow me—to leave his father and mother, his wife, and go with me. But how many are ripe for such a task? And it was not for that I had set out upon my way.”

The fever increased. He lay bathed in perspiration, and his eyes glittered more brightly than before. The others gathered closer round him, trying to calm him, begging him not to tire himself with talking, but he went on:

“And now that I am to go, my greatest sorrow is that there is none to take up my poor work. For what is the work of one man? Oh, if there were enough; if there were many who could understand that the greatest of all is to put aside self and bring peace on earth. That the greatest joy of all is to be a poor man, going from place to place and showing others the way to free their hearts from the yoke of worldly things. But the priests—they have taken office and would keep it; they are paid for their work in money, and grasp at it; they seek a higher and a higher place in worldly things, for their heart is set on worldly gain—not with their people, not with their God. It is much to ask. I know—too much to ask of any in these days. But it is because none will give it that hatred and dissension live and grow. I do not know—forgive me that I say this—I do not *know* if there is any God, but I believe and hope it. If I should say I know, it would be a lie. But I do know that there is more happiness in peace than in a divided mind. I know that enmity makes the heart evil, and that friendship makes it good. And I know that our life is made richer by love and goodness; easier to bear, more natural. Where all is hatred and strife, who can find any meaning

in life at all? The only thing that helps us to understand life at all is our own striving for the best in it."

The room grew darker. As the sick man spoke his last words, the daylight faded.

"Light," he said. "The darkness will be long enough when it comes."

A candle was lighted and placed beside the bed. Silence filled the room, broken only by the old man's heavy breathing. Those around him were busy each with his own thoughts. Alma sat on the sofa, and had apparently lapsed into her usual state of semi-consciousness, from which the arrival of the wanderer had roused her for a moment. It grew dark and the light was lit, but she did not heed.

Suddenly the old man whispered faintly:

"Help me off with my clothes."

Runa and Ormarr did so; tears came to their eyes at the sight of his miserable rags. Ørlygur sat apart, his face swollen with weeping. Ketill smiled as the cold sheets touched his body.

Suddenly his expression changed to one of earnest thought. And after a little while he asked:

"If—if Alma would come and sit beside me here."

The Danish Lady roused herself a little as they helped her to the bedside; she took the sick man's hands in hers and stroked them. Then after a little while she sank back into helplessness again.

Ketill lay with a smile on his face. Once he tried to lift his head, but could not.

"Only a little while now," he said. Then, glancing towards old Kata, he went on:

"Lay her hands on my lips, that I may kiss them."

Kata did so.

"Forgive me," he murmured, as he kissed the limp hands of her who had been his wife. "And good-bye for a little while."

"It is time now," he said faintly—"time to say good-bye to all."

One after another bent over him, kissed his forehead, and received the touch of his lips.

Ørlygur came last. He threw himself down sobbing on the bed.

"My son—my son," the old man whispered. Then his face seemed to harden, and he lay as if unconscious. After a while he looked up again, and seemed trying to speak. Faintly at first, then in a stronger voice, he spoke once more:

"God—God—my God! . . ."

His hands twitched feebly.

"Are you still there? Have they all gone?"

His hands dropped limply to his sides. Those near him touched his fingers, but could not speak.

"I can feel you are with me still. But I cannot move my hands. Is this death?"

He breathed with difficulty.

Suddenly, with his old, powerful voice, he cried aloud: "Alma, Alma!"

He raised himself up in bed and then fell back. Guest the One-eyed—a Guest on earth for twenty weary years—was no more. And Sera Ketill, priest, had won the peace he sought.

Those who watched and understood had eyes only for the man there on the bed. None noticed the Danish Lady.

When her name was called, Alma clutched at her heart. Now she sat still, looking vaguely round. Then, rising, she asked in a new voice that made the others start:

"Where am I?"

And, flushing slightly, she went on:

"That was Ketill's voice."

She pressed her hands to her breast once more, and sank down. Her heart had ceased to beat.

Her sudden, unexpected death came with a shock to the others, and they stopped weeping. For a moment all stood as if turned to stone.

Then they lifted her up and laid her on the bed beside her husband. And all knelt beside the bed in silent prayer.

The candle flickered in the dark, throwing a restless gleam on the pale faces of the dead. The darkness seemed creeping in to cover them.

For a little all was deathly still.

Then old Kata rose and opened a window—"to let the souls pass out." And, going over to the others, she knelt with them beside the bed.

But the light went out in the draught, and darkness closed about the living and the dead.

BOOK IV

THE YOUNG EAGLE

CHAPTER I

A PALE face showed behind a window in a dimly lighted room. The features were young, but sharply marked, and the eyes had a strange, far-away look. It was as if they were peering into life from within the portals of death, or as if searching into the great unknown, striving to fathom the hereafter, longing for peace, praying for peace, yet finding none. Finding only a growing unrest, a torturing uncertainty that grew and grew, an ever-increasing agony of longing.

That is what the night saw.

But the eyes behind the window looked out over the landscape that lay spread before them in shadowy billows under the dark autumn sky, seeking to recognize something here and there. That way should be a homestead; it was there in the daylight; surely it should be visible now. But the eyes looked in vain; the gazer found himself at last imagining that the great expanse of shadow was that of a cloud on which he sailed across the sky.

There was a sort of comfort in thus letting imagination run its course. Yet unconsciously he pressed his foot to the floor, as if to make sure of being still on earth. Up in the whirling ocean of space there was no lasting foothold anywhere. And yet it was a pleasant fancy—to be sailing through the sky. Clouds were things that came and went, and melted into space under the rays of the sun. When this particular cloud on which he rode should end, and he himself be hurled through space, where would he land? Would he land anywhere at all?

He expected to see the dark shadow change its shape, but in vain. This was a check; the sameness of the outlook irritated him. Evidently both he and his cloud were shamefully dull, that they could not move better than this.

And he looked up towards the heavens, as if to call the attention of his lazy cloud to its swifter-moving fellows above.

No sooner had he done so, however, than his flight of fancy was forgotten. There were the stars—and they fascinated him in turn.

Grey clouds spread their net across the heavens, drifting rapidly from west to east, hiding and revealing the twinkling stars as they raced by.

Suddenly it seemed to him as if the clouds were standing still, and the stars themselves moved across the sky, crawling hurriedly over the meshes of the cloudy net, showing clear in a blue space one moment and vanishing the next.

So intently did he follow the fancied movement of the stars that in a little time his eyes were dazzled; it seemed as if he himself had been drawn into a dance of stars.

He closed his eyes. And, as he did so, sank into oblivion, with a disturbed yet sorely needed rest.

It was only for a moment. Abruptly he again became conscious of his surroundings. His vision returned from its wild wanderings, and crept, as it were, behind him—he saw himself—a pale face behind the window in a dimly lighted room.

The sight came as a shock; grim reality had taken the place of fancy now. And a sensation of horror came over him—he started back from the window as if he had seen a ghost.

His eyes fell upon the two open coffins, with their white draperies, that seemed to take shape as he watched them—the shape of what lay within. The dim light of the tapers helped to bring him back to the present, and even the weight of grief that came with it brought in its train a restfulness of its own.

Silently he crossed the room and sat down at the foot of the coffins, gazing at them till the white of the wrappings pained his eyes.

Then, bending forward, he fell into a fit of sobbing. A sense of utter helplessness came over him; soul and sense were dulled.

CHAPTER II

SOMEONE was scraping cautiously at the door.

He sprang from his seat, and fear gripped his heart once more. He rubbed his eyes, realizing that he had been asleep, and stared round him to see what had wakened him.

The noise was renewed, this time with a subdued whine. He grew calmer now, and opened the door.

A pair of brown eyes and the sharp nose of a dog appeared in the gloom of the passage. The animal looked up at him pleadingly, waiting for leave to enter. And once inside, it stopped still.

Ørlygur seated himself once more by the coffins, taking no heed of the dog. He had forgotten it. For the moment he was occupied wholly with a sense of dissatisfaction with himself; time after time that night he had allowed himself to be taken by surprise. First, he had let fancy run riot in his brain; then, on coming to himself, he had given way to a sense of fear; sleep had overcome him, and on waking he had allowed himself to give way to fear again. He knew there was nothing to fear; he was no coward—it was only when taken by surprise. . . .

Involuntarily he glanced towards the door, where the dog had lain down. A pair of bright, watchful eyes met his, and the thought flashed through his mind that no human being could be more faithful than this dog. He beckoned it to him, and the animal promptly obeyed. It crept up close to him and laid its head upon his knees, licking his hand affectionately.

For a moment he enjoyed the kindly touch. Then his thoughts went wandering again.

"I can never be happy again," he thought to himself. "I cannot understand how any one can be happy now. What

pleasure is there in anything? Everything dies at last. Eternity—the everlasting—it is terrible to think of. And all one's life but a drop in the ocean—what does it matter if we live or die? And our joys and sorrows—what are they, after all? All becomes insignificant. Some are glad when the sun shines; others are glad without knowing why. It is simple foolishness. Have they never seen a man die? Do they forget that one day they, too, must die?—die and rot . . .”

The tears flowed down his cheeks, but he did not move; his features were set as though already stiffening in death.

“Die and rot in the grave. . . .”

And he breathed softly, as if breathing in the air of death in the room, while the tears still flowed.

Suddenly he closed his eyes, and pictured himself dead and rotting—his flesh pale and bloodless—turning green and ghastly—falling from the bones, hanging in strips from the fingers and stripping like a mask from the face to bare the clenched, grinning teeth.

He opened his eyes with a start; an icy shiver passed through him, and he clenched his hands. But he did not move from his seat.

“God in heaven,” he thought, “I am going mad!”

His tears ceased to flow. And in a moment he was cool and collected once more. It was as if the trouble had passed from him, leaving only a deep earnestness.

And in unconscious effort to protect himself his thoughts turned towards the woman he loved.

He saw her now, in his mind; her lovely figure, her masses of golden hair, her bright, smiling face, and her eyes, that spoke so eloquently when they met his. Involuntarily he smiled.

But no sooner was he conscious of having smiled than the joy was gone, and his face relapsed into the same cold, sad look.

“If she had never seen me,” he thought. “If she had lived far away, or in some other time—then her eyes would

have smiled at the sight of another as they do now for me. What is it all worth after all? An accident—a casual chance. Or could it be that, even if both she and I had been different, we should have loved each other still?"

Tears came to his eyes.

"I can never be happy," he thought again. "Once I was always happy; always sure that the future would bring joy, more joy . . . and I never dreamed but that it was good and happy to live. Now I am changed. I cannot understand it all. Everything seems different—even my thoughts are new to me. All changed . . . I am like a stranger to myself. And why—what is the cause of it all? Because my father that I believed to be dead comes home alive—and dies."

He sat staring before him

Once more he surveyed the varied phases through which he had passed from the time when ten days before he had first come upon Guest the One-eyed in the mountains—not knowing then that the wise and kindly wanderer, beloved of all, was no other than his father, the hated Sera Ketill, who had disappeared twenty years back, and was looked on as dead—from that first meeting until now, when he sat keeping watch over two corpses; that of the beggar who had been twenty years on pilgrimage to expiate his sins, and that of his wife, the Danish Lady at Hof, who during those twenty years had paid the penalty of her husband's crimes, only to forgive him at the last and follow him on his last long journey across the river of Death.

It was a week now since the two had died. And they were to be buried next day.

Örlygur had begged and received permission to watch over them on this their last night on earth. It had been his great desire to keep that vigil alone, for he hoped that the night would bring him some revelation of himself; his feelings, his strength, his will.

The succession of unexpected happenings, the complete revolution in his inner and outer life, had left him in a state of vague unrest, a prey to dreams and longings hitherto un-

known to him. A strange and mysterious power seemed hovering over him, possessing him completely. All life seemed changed.

The desire for common worldly pleasures and success, the thought of being looked up to by his fellow-men—all seemed empty and meaningless now—or even sinful.

The dying words of Guest the One-eyed had burnt themselves into his heart, filling him with remorse and spiritual unrest. What was it he had said about a successor—one to carry on his work—to show his fellows that the greatest joy in life was a pilgrimage in poverty and humility, setting aside all worldly things? . . .

Ørlygur could not forget—the dying man's voice; his intonation remained firmly impressed on his mind; he saw again the look of sadness on the wrinkled face as the wanderer lay back on his pillow.

And to him, the son of the aged pilgrim, it was as the opening of a new world of thought. He had promised himself to take up the task, to continue the work his father had begun, without a thought of the difficulties that might lie in his way.

As long as the undertaking remained as but an inward emotion, a consciousness of his intention, burning within him like a sacred flame that consumed all gloomy doubts, so long did he feel himself uplifted in soul, raised far above to a height where his bereavement itself seemed but a little thing. He almost felt that in thus bowing to his father's will and vowing to accomplish his desire, he had saved the weary pilgrim from the horror of death.

And for a while the difficulties of realization never crossed his mind.

At times he did remember that he was a lover. But the self-reproach with which he realized that he had for a time forgotten his love passed off again: a momentary remembrance, no more.

During the first days of this his new passion he was as one entranced, lifted above himself in a fervour of resolve. His soul was possessed by one thought, by a mighty dazzling

dream. A glorious ray of golden light streamed into his mind, to the exclusion of all else. His soul answered to but one note—the mighty theme of self-sacrifice that rang through it.

Intoxicated with joy, he passed the long nights without sleep. At first the new, strange exultation more than outweighed the physical strain, and the grey days that came and went seemed bright and beautiful. He had never known what it was to suffer from sleeplessness; nights without sleep seemed now but an added treasure, an extended scope for happy consciousness. But soon the climax came, and his feast of dreams was at an end.

The days lost their beauty. He was weary and irritable from the moment he rose; he longed for night to come, for peace and solitude in which to dream again. But when night came and he sought to gather up once more the threads of his imaginings, his brain was dull, and his mind refused to frame new thoughts. At first he tried to content himself with merely recalling what he had dreamed before. It satisfied him for a while, but a repetition showed the things once glorious as dull and faded; he could hardly understand how he had ever been so moved by what now seemed vague and distant. And with sorrow in his heart, as for something lost, he fell asleep. Next day he resolved to watch the last night by the dead, and had obtained his wish to keep the vigil alone.

It had not dawned upon him that he had already been defeated—that the life he had resolved upon was a thing foreign to him, with no root in his soul, an abrupt departure from his natural bent and his former ways. He did not know that suffering was a gift of Fate, granted to many, yet to few in such extent that they are able to forget their own good and ill, and live for others wholly. He did not know that it is only the chosen of Sorrow who are freed from all thought of self.

Even had he grasped the truth, it would not have helped him to relinquish his ideas and admit they were but weavings of an over-sensitive mind. His nature was too stubborn to give in without a bitter struggle.

And his doubts did not come openly to begin with, but in disguise; only later, after long uncertainty and pondering, did they reveal themselves as what they were.

Irresolution, following on the tense pitch of excitement, rendered him distrustful of himself to an unwonted degree.

He sat now with bowed head, as if listening intently in a world of silence. And it seemed as if the silence spoke to him. No natural utterance, this sound that reached his ears, but an unknown tongue, a passing murmur of something mysterious—a wave that rose and fell, now loud, now low.

He strove with all his sense to find some meaning—at times it seemed as if words and sentences were there, but disconnected, without any purport he could understand.

Breathlessly he listened. His brain throbbed; all his faculties were concentrated in one present effort; this thing that was being told him now—he must hear it, understand it. That was all his task. Perhaps it might solve all the riddles of his questioning—give him a key to life.

And suddenly his sub-conscious mind came to his aid, whispering some lines from a poem by Hjalmar à Bolu. And in relief he murmured the words to himself, lifting his head and breathing freely once more:

“If Thou wilt not hear my words,
Divine, eternal grace,
Then shall the burning cry of my blood
Sunder the heavens about Thee.”

CHAPTER III

THE stars in the east grew fainter, till they paled into nothingness, and the day rose slowly over the hills.

The clouds had gone, save for a heavy bank that hung becalmed in the west. Daylight spread abroad, and the blue of the sky grew brighter, until it almost lost itself in a shimmering white.

A strangely beautiful morning; the earth seemed aglow with such delight of day as is only seen when its face is furrowed by autumn. The heather shone blood-red on the hillside, as if striving to show the world that its glow was that of life, and not of death. The waters of fjord and stream were calm and still as if storm and turbulence were strangers there. Even the unmown grass of the fields was smiling with dewdrops on every yellowing stalk and blade reflecting the bright rays. And over the close-cropped stretches where the grass had been cut, the dew lay in a glistening carpet. Not a sound on the stillness of the air, not so much as the cry of a sheep or the neighing of a horse.

Not till the farm hands were astir, with an opening of doors and the sound of human voices, was the spell broken, and the almost unworldly stillness gave place to the work and life of common day.

The first to open his door that morning was Ormarr à Borg. And he remained standing with bowed head close outside the house. He was not thinking of the world of nature about him, and paid no heed to the glory of the morning sun that shone on his white hair and slight, stooping figure. His features were strained, and the pallor of his face, the redness of his eyes, showed that he had not slept. He stood a little while, then folded his thin hands, with the fingers that were still those of a violinist, bowed his

head, and with closed eyes and compressed lips prayed the Lord's Prayer.

Suddenly he drew himself up, passed his hands over his face, and smiled.

"Strange," he murmured. "Why should I have done that now? I have said that prayer aloud in church for years, and at home with the rest. But I have not said it by myself since I can remember."

The smile left his face, and he grew serious. "What is more strange," he continued, "is that I should feel almost ashamed of it myself after."

He shook his head. "Are we afraid of ourselves more than of others?"

He raised his head and glanced round, seeking for something else to occupy his mind. He noticed the beauty of the day, and felt the peace of it with grateful relief.

Then he turned, walked through the passage, and softly entered the room where the dead lay.

Ørlygur was seated by the coffins, his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands. His dog lay at his feet, asleep.

As Ormarr entered, he looked up; his eyes showed that he had been sleeping. Ormarr smiled—a strangely gentle smile—but made no sign of having seen that the boy had slept. But Ørlygur sprang to his feet, flushing hotly, and answered only with an inaudible murmur when Ormarr bade him good morning.

Ormarr stepped quietly across the room and made the sign of the cross above the bodies. Then, turning to Ørlygur, he said, with great tenderness:

"Go in and rest, lad, till it is time to start."

Ørlygur's face had paled again; he looked straight in the other's eyes.

"No!" he said. And his tone was so harsh, so defiant, that Ormarr wondered what could be in his mind. Possibly the lad was hurt at the proposal coming a moment after he had awakened from sleep.

"I did not mean to hurt you," said Ormarr quietly.

"I know," answered Ørlygur in a gentler tone. "Don't misunderstand me. I only meant that—we can always get all the sleep we need—more than enough."

Silently the two men left the room and went out into the open.

Ormarr was anxious for a quiet talk with Ørlygur, whose manner lately had been strange. He had formed his own opinion as to the reason—but that last defiant "No!" and the frank, conciliatory tone of the following words seemed to require some further explanation.

It had occurred to Ormarr that, as he had never himself referred to the girl Snebiorg, Ørlygur might perhaps imagine he was hostile to any union between them, whereas nothing could be farther from his mind; had not the boy's father on his death-bed given him his blessing? Ormarr was eager to make his attitude clear in regard to this at least.

As they walked, he studied the young man's face. There was a strange, far-away look in his eyes that baffled him.

He had intended to open the matter directly, but somehow he felt it impossible to do so now. And, fearing lest Ørlygur should notice his scrutiny, he looked away, and said casually:

"The sun has come to warm the graves for them, it seems."

Ørlygur glanced up at the sun, and was silent for a moment; then he answered absently:

"Yes. The sun must have been his best friend in life."

The old man turned towards him; the tone and manner in which he had spoken were unusual.

"Those in misfortune," he said softly, "have but few friends as a rule."

Ørlygur's eyes took on the same fixed, determined look they had shown in the chamber of death a little before.

"He was not one of those in misfortune," he answered steadily, with a dignity beyond his years; "he was more fortunate than all."

Ormarr looked at him with his wise old eyes, as if to read his innermost thoughts. But there was a tremor at his heart. "This is Faith," he thought to himself. "Faith

in something that seems sure beyond all doubt. It is the first time it has come to him in life. If the boy were a Catholic, now, he would turn monk; he is convinced at this moment that self-abnegation is the one true way. God alone knows the workings of his mind, but it is a dangerous crisis to pass through."

And, looking away from him again, Ormarr pursued his own train of thought.

"He is hardly what one would call of a religious bent. That is well. It may be only a slight attack; perhaps it will pass off. After all, he is still a child in many ways. But he needs some one to help him—and must not know it."

He smiled at a sudden thought. "I am glad I caught him asleep."

They reached the wall of the enclosure, and stopped. Then, as if he had been thinking of this all the time, Ormarr began:

"There was something I wanted to say to you. I would have left it till later, but it is best to get it said. It is something that concerns you deeply—I mean about the girl."

Ørlygur started slightly; Ormarr detected at once that he was ill at ease. But he said nothing, and Ormarr went on:

"You have said nothing to me about any relationship with her, and perhaps it is as well. But from what your dear father said, you love one another, and you yourself are fully determined to marry her. Is that so?"

Ørlygur was so taken aback that he was at a loss for a moment. He felt that there were obstacles in the way, that he ought to make some objection now. But he could do no more than stammer out a low-voiced "Yes."

Ormarr was satisfied. He had gained something at once. And without appearing to have marked the young man's hesitation, still less divine its cause, he continued:

"Well, then, I don't see any reason for delay. Once the matter has been decided, the sooner it is accomplished, the better. I will confess that at first I was not altogether disposed to approve of it. You may have noticed that—and for that reason hesitated to tell me of your intentions. But, now, I can only say that both your mother and myself are

looking forward with pleasure to your marriage. It will be the happiest day of the life that yet remains to us when we can see you wedded to the woman you love. And as far as we are concerned, there is nothing to prevent your taking over the place here in the spring. We are both a little weary, though we are not so very old. You will understand that ours has not been a restful life, or a very happy one, and it will be a double pleasure to see you happily settled. All that we wish for is to end our days in peace. And so—God bless you. If our wishes could secure it, Borg should be once more a home of happiness and peace.”

Tears rose to Ormarr's eyes as he spoke, and his hand trembled as he offered it. He was deeply moved, partly by memories of the past that rose up in his mind, and also by the thought that the young man's happiness depended on the success of his, Ormarr's, own stratagem before it was too late.

Ørlygur grasped the hand held out to him. He wept at seeing his foster-father's emotion, and also because he felt that he was here being forced into something; he was in a way defeated. But at the same time the picture of Snebiorg rose to his mind; it seemed almost as if she were there with them. What was he to do? Sooner or later he must either prove false to her or to the promise he had silently given by his father's death-bed. For the moment he could come to no decision—he could only weep. His helplessness pained him. It was terrible to think that he must choose between giving up his love or betray his promise.

He held Ormarr's hand in his, and strove to speak, but could say nothing for tears.

Say something he must. And at length he stammered out: “Not now—I cannot. Another time. But not—not this spring.”

He let go the other's hand, and hurried away, with bowed head. But the old man stood still, looking after him with tearful eyes.

“Poor lad,” he murmured. “But—thank God, he loves her. And that will save him.”

Thoughtfully Ormarr walked back to the house.

CHAPTER IV

ON leaving Ørlygur, Ormarr went in to see to the preparations for the funeral. Ørlygur went off to a corner of the enclosure where he would be out of sight of the house. There he stood, leaning against the wall, and looking out over the valley.

His tears had ceased, and a strange calm crept over him.

"So it was that," he thought to himself. "It was that I could not understand. But I see it now. I must choose between her and—my mission."

The idea involved in this last word made him start.

"My mission—but how do I know it is that? Anyhow, whether or no, it does not matter. I have promised—I have given my word to one who is now dead—and that my father. I must either break my word to him, or desert her."

He gazed thoughtfully up at the mountains.

"Those mountains there—how wonderful they are. Peak after peak rising to heaven, and sweet grassy slopes between. But loveliest looking down, on to the glassy lakes. Borgarfjall, with its great masses of rock, rising steeply up towards the sky. No one has ever set foot there—only the eagles have ever reached those heights."

The look in his eyes faded, and he stood gazing vacantly before him.

"Desert her," he thought to himself. "She who leaned towards me, and touched my cheek with her own. How could I think of it! *She* could never be faithless. How would she look if she learned? . . . Oh, the sight would kill me. Nothing more terrible to see than the eyes of a creature that has lost what it hoped for and believed in. To see that in her eyes . . ."

He laughed—a cold, forced laugh.

"What a coward I am, after all. I can think of leaving

her, forsaking her, and breaking promises so sacred that they could not even be uttered in words. But I dare not even think of meeting her eyes when she knows. What a cur I must be—and I—I would go out into the world as an apostle.”

He shook his head.

“It is madness. How could I ever bring peace to any soul, when I start my pilgrimage by robbing her who trusted me of her heart’s peace?”

An evil light showed in his eyes.

“I wonder . . . would she really suffer so very much after all? . . .”

He clenched his fists.

“Oh, I deserve to be whipped! And, in any case, I am not worthy of *her* love. It seems I am growing into a rogue. I dare not look her in the face now. Her eyes—so pure . . . and her soul, clean and free from any evil thought. And she—she trusts me—trusts *me* . . . it is horrible!”

He drew a deep breath.

“I might go to her, and tell her everything. She would understand. But—her heart would feel but one thing of it all—that we must part. And that is all that my heart can feel now.”

He sighed, but in a moment his face hardened again.

“This is temptation. And I was nearly giving way. Nearly gave in at the first onset. I am too weak. The first thing to do is to take some decisive step, to cut off all retreat. But how?”

A thought came suddenly to his mind, and he shuddered.

“Today—at the graveside. Say it there, say it for all to hear; swear it . . . and then I shall be bound for life, for ever. And then—what then?”

His whole body trembled; his teeth chattered; he cried to God in his agony of doubt. But he felt that his prayer was not sincere. And with faltering step he made his way back to the house.

A voice within him spoke, urging him earnestly, clearly:

“Do not do it. It is more than you can keep. You may

say the words, but you will not mean what you say from your heart. What *can* you do or say?"

He would not listen, but he tried in vain to disregard the voice that would be heard. He staggered like a drunken man; his strength failed him.

Then the first voice died away and another spoke scornfully:

"You will make a fool of yourself, that is all."

He stopped suddenly, and turned pale. But only for a moment. Then he walked on with a firm step.

"That was vanity," he murmured. "It was only my fear of what others would think. Now I know what I have to do."

CHAPTER V

THE funeral of Guest the One-eyed and the Danish Lady was to take place at noon.

From the time Ørlygur returned to the house to the setting out of the funeral train, the hours had passed without his knowing it. Great numbers of people flocked to the house; all greeted him when they arrived. Some he greeted in return; others he did not appear to notice at all. He was strangely absent in his manner, but this was readily forgiven, as being due to his grief at the sudden loss.

When he was called in to bid a last farewell to the mortal remains before the coffins were closed, he burst into a violent fit of sobbing. His meditations of the night before on the emptiness of worldly things, the hopelessness of life, returned to him vividly. He was conscious, too, that it was not only the death of these two who had gone that pained him most. He saw himself as a miserably selfish creature. At such a time, there should be no place in his heart for other feeling than sorrow at the double bereavement, and yet in fact he was only sorry for himself. He despised himself; he felt that if others could read his heart they would look down on him in scorn. Their word of sympathy and consolation stung him; he shrank from the thought of the ceremony to come, when he would be forced to take part with all these others.

Why not bury our dear ones quietly, in some secluded spot? Why make an exhibition of one's grief before the world? In his own case, it was the more intolerable, since his grief was in reality not for the dead.

He heard the lids screwed down, and stood weeping, with his handkerchief to his eyes. Suddenly he became aware of a stir in the room, and looked up. People were standing round with Prayer Books in their hands, turning the pages to find the hymn that was to be sung.

The priest, whom he had not noticed before, was there standing by the coffins, book in hand.

Ørlygur again pressed his handkerchief to his eyes. The priest was speaking, but he paid no heed to what was being said, and continued to weep silently.

Then there was a pause, and the bearers prepared to move. A psalm was to be sung as the coffins were carried out.

Ørlygur dried his eyes and hurried away, all moving aside respectfully to let him pass. He ground his teeth, and could hardly refrain from crying out.

"They should spit on me," he thought to himself. "It is no more than I deserve. I am unworthy of their sympathy—I do not even care for it!" For a moment he felt as if he must shout the thought aloud.

Outside the house some one handed him the reins of his horse; the animal stood there ready saddled. He stood beside it, one arm thrown over the animal's neck. The horse rubbed itself affectionately against him, as if inviting the customary caress. But he took no heed, and remained standing motionless. His dog lay at the feet of the horse, and looked up; the two animals exchanged greetings in their own way, sniffing at each other.

The coffins were to be carried by horses, two to each burden. The first pair were brought forward, and planks slung between them. Then a psalm was sung, and the first coffin fastened in its place.

When both were thus secured, the train moved off, the mourners and followers leading their horses until the psalm was at an end. Then all mounted, and rode on in silence towards the vicarage at Hof.

Ørlygur rode behind the second coffin, gazing out over the country with tear-stained eyes.

"It all looks strange," he thought to himself. "As if it were there only for a time. Or is it only myself that am become a stranger? My mind that has so changed that nothing in it now can last? It seems so. We see things according to the mood of our own mind. I seem like a stone set rolling, knowing nothing of where it will stop.

"Not a pleasant thing to be compared with, either. A rolling stone must needs be on the downward track. Well, after all, most comparisons have a weakness somewhere. A stone rolling down from barren mountains to a grassy valley, where it finds a softer bed, has surely changed for the better. But my path lies the opposite way. And no one ever knew a stone roll upward. Only the glowing rock, hurled from the bowels of the earth by a volcano, comes to a rest in the mountains after an upward flight. Oh, what nonsense!" he broke off. "I am not a stone.

"Or, at least, it is only my heart that is of stone," he went on bitterly. "Why can I feel no real grief at my loss? Why is there room in my heart for all these things on such a day as this? Am I worse than other people, I wonder? I do not feel unkindly towards any one. Or is it that *thinking* of sorrow stifles the real sorrow itself? If *she* were dead . . ."

He turned pale at the thought, and tears flowed from his eyes.

"God in heaven! That would mean death to me—to live would be impossible. Her body to decay, her golden hair to be soiled by earth—her eyes lifeless and dull. . . ."

His heart beat as if it would burst, and he shivered.

"Death is disgusting," he thought.

Suddenly he ceased to weep, and a silence seemed to fill him.

"I cannot bear to think of her as dead," he thought. "And yet I have planned to do that which will ruin her life—to kill her love, and strike her soul the cruellest blow that any human being can inflict upon another. What a desperate tangle it all is. Would it not be better for her to die? Would it not be better if I were to end her life—kill her at once? Surely it would. But it was not her I was thinking of. I was only thinking of myself; not of what would be best for her, but of what would hurt me least. And if it were better for her to die, then what I am about to do is a greater crime than if I took her life. . . ."

Örlygur was so deep in thought that he did not observe the progress of the party until they had reached the church-

yard, and the others dismounted. Only when the coffin in front, on which his eyes were fixed, was lowered to the ground did he come to himself and get down from his horse.

His last thoughts had almost stunned him; his brain seemed incapable of normal action. As if in a trance he followed the coffins into the church, and remained standing with bowed head while the psalms were sung and the priest delivered his oration. He noticed nothing of what was passing round him.

In a few minutes now they would be at the graveside; the coffins would be lowered, and then, as was the custom, he would be expected to say something himself.

What should he say? There was no clear idea in his mind—well, no doubt something would occur to him when the moment came. What he said did not matter much, as long as he said something.

The coffins were brought out, and the mourners gathered close round the double grave. Ørlygur stood just behind the mound of earth that had been thrown up.

The coffins were lowered into the earth, the mourners singing and weeping; the priest cast earth into the grave, and the last hymn was sung. Mechanically Ørlygur stepped up on to the mound. He felt that all eyes were upon him—that all were waiting expectantly for him to speak. He raised his eyes, and looked round.

His gaze fell on a pair of tear-stained blue eyes on the other side of the grave. There was a look in them almost of fear—an anxious uncertainty such as he had never before seen on *her* face. But no sooner had her eyes met his than her expression changed, and the strange look vanished.

It had never occurred to him that Snebiorg might be at the funeral; he had not noticed her till now. She had been among those who joined the party at the church. It was a shock to him to see her now, so overcome with grief, and with that look of doubt and fear upon her face—it struck him to the heart.

And here he stood, on a mound by the graveside, with all eyes upon him. All were waiting to hear what he would say. Speak now he must. He pulled himself together, but

his heart trembled at the thought of what he must say. *She* was standing there. Well, she would forgive him, when she heard it all—heard the confession and the promise from his own mouth.

He looked round hesitatingly. His foster-father was looking at him with a strange expression—a look that made him lower his eyes.

Ormarr had seen that Ørlygur was about to speak. He did not know what was in the boy's mind, but something told him that what he was about to say must not be said. He fixed his gaze on the young man's face with all his inner power concentrated in his eyes, trying to compel his attention. Ørlygur was looking at Snebiorg; Ormarr saw him hesitate. This seemed further proof that there was something which must be averted. At last Ormarr caught his eye; and Ørlygur bowed his head.

Then Ormarr turned and left the grave. It was a sign for the gathering to disperse.

But the thought which had checked Ørlygur when he met his foster-father's gaze was the remembrance of his having been found sleeping that morning at his vigil by the dead. With that in his mind, and with that look fixed on his face, he *could* not say what he had planned. It was impossible.

He stood staring down into the grave.

Those present thought only that the boy was too deeply moved to say the words of affectionate farewell he would have uttered. And all, even the men who had come up to fill in the grave, moved away and left him to himself.

He seemed as if turned to stone.

"Too late," he thought. "And now—what am I to do? Is all to go on as before? That cannot be—I at least am no longer the same. . . ."

And with a sigh he thought of *how* he had changed not for the better, but for the worse. He was a coward.

And, looking down into the grave, he spoke aloud:

"I am growing less and less worthy to be called your son."

And to himself he continued:

"Why do you not help me? Why do you not stand by me

when you see me so weak? Or is it your will that I should not be aided in this?"

Suddenly he remembered how his father on his death-bed had blessed his union with Snebiorg, and a wave of joy flowed through his heart.

"Father—father!" he cried, with tears in his voice. "Is that your will? But what of my promise? . . ."

His joy turned to grief at the thought. And so, at issue with himself, he stood looking down into the grave.

The priest came up.

"What does he want now, I wonder?" thought Ørlygur, watching the approaching figure with indifferent eyes. The whole air and bearing of this well-fed, self-satisfied priest were intolerable to him. It was worst of all when he spoke, with dead words and traditional phrases that meant nothing.

The priest came up to him, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"My young friend," he began—he was fifteen years older than Ørlygur himself—"I can well understand how you must feel the loss of such a father—a man of rare virtue in this wicked world. Yet it should be a consolation to you to know that he died at peace with God."

Ørlygur looked at him, thinking still. Here was this man pouring out a stream of words over him. It was horrible to hear. "God" in his mouth sounded worse than devil.

"We should all remember," the priest went on, "that however much we may grieve at losing the dear departed, there is comfort in the thought that they are beyond the power of evil—that death is but the gateway to the Kingdom of Glory. And to these two especially, death must have come as a blessed deliverance."

Ørlygur looked at him without speaking. "He thinks he is much wiser than I," was his thought.

"The burial of the dead," went on the priest, "should really be an occasion for rejoicing. In any case, the dominant feeling in the hearts of the bereaved should be one of joy at the thought that those who have left us have passed to their true home. And be sure that God looks with more approval on such a thought than on any outburst of uncontrolled grief,

which is really nothing but selfish sorrow for the loss we have sustained through His will, and rebellion against His decrees. All is according to the will of God, and we should cheerfully and gladly bow to His divine pleasure."

Ørlygur let the priest run on. "He is a fool," he thought. "He means well, no doubt, but is none the less a fool. This is one of his stock prescriptions for cases where some formal consolation has to be delivered. He is a sort of spiritual quack. When a man loses his father, he pours out a dose from a bottle—a big bottle, but containing only a very ordinary mixture. As a student of the human heart, he is ignorant to a degree. He cannot imagine that a mourner standing by a grave should have any other feeling than that of loss. He sees it merely as an ordinary case, calling for the usual nostrums. And he talks of a wounded heart as if it were inflammation of the lungs. What does he know of the range of feeling in a human heart?"

The priest went on in the same tone as before. Ørlygur said nothing.

"He wants me to say something," thought Ørlygur. "But what am I to say? Tell him it is a fine day? I wonder if he would go away if I did? I wish I could get rid of him somehow; he tires me. I would rather climb a mountain than listen to more of this. Look at Borgarfjall there, lofty and steep. I would sooner climb it to the top than listen to this priest for half a day."

Suddenly he turned to the man, with a smile, and said: "Look here, I've thought of something. Some day, when I have time, I want to climb up to the top of Borgarfjall there and build a bit of a monument on the top. It's a fine-looking mountain, but I don't like the outline of the top. Ought to have something there—don't you think?"

The priest stared at him, dumb with astonishment.

"I hardly think any but a bird could get up there," he said hesitatingly.

"Well, it's certainly no place for silly sheep," retorted Ørlygur, with a laugh. "Good-day to you."

And he turned and walked away.

The priest stood looking after him in perplexity.

"Now, was that intentional rudeness," he said to himself, "or has he lost his senses?"

It was some minutes before he could sufficiently regain his priestly dignity and composure to leave the churchyard.

The men came to fill in the grave, and the mourners flocked round to lay their wreaths on the mound that covered the remains of Guest the One-eyed and the Danish Lady.

Among them were Ormarr and his wife Runa. Snebiorg and her mother were also there, but there was no sign of Ørlygur to be seen. He had met the doctor, a man whom he liked, and was walking with him a little distance off.

Ormarr and Runa went up to the widow from Bolli and her daughter, and greeted them kindly, thanking them for their attendance. They talked for a little of indifferent matters, and then Ormarr said suddenly to the widow:

"I should like to have a word with you alone."

Snebiorg blushed, and remained shyly standing beside Runa, while Ormarr and her mother went off a little way. The widow's face revealed nothing of her feelings, but in her heart she was keenly aware that what was coming concerned her daughter's happiness and her own peace of mind.

"Ørlygur seems strange today," she thought to herself. "I hope nothing is wrong." And she strove to repress a sigh.

As soon as they were out of hearing of the others, Ormarr spoke.

"I do not know if you are aware of it," he said, "but Ørlygur and Bagga love each other. I have only known it myself a few days."

The widow nodded, and Ormarr went on:

"I only wished to tell you that my wife and I heartily approve of their marrying."

The widow's face brightened; the wrinkles seemed smoothed away. Unable to speak, she offered Ormarr a trembling hand. Ormarr grasped it cordially, and then, putting his arm through hers, they walked up and down together.

"I may be frank with you," Ormarr went on. "We have

known each other for a long time now, and I am sure you will not be hasty. First of all, I must tell you that Runa and I were opposed to the idea to begin with. We should never have attempted to stand in the way of his own wishes, but we hoped he would give up his intention of marrying Snebiorg. But my brother, whom we have buried today, gave his blessing to the union, and from that moment I felt that my own reasons for opposing it had only been poor and of minor importance. And now that I have told you this, I can come to what I chiefly wanted to say. Something has happened to Ørlygur; what it is I do not know, for he has not confided in me or in any one else. He is hardly likely to open his heart to any one on the subject, I think. But I have an idea as to what is passing in his mind, and I am anxious about him. Even if he should appear to have changed his mind with regard to Bagga, I want you to do your utmost to encourage her and keep her faithful to him, for I know that in his heart he loves her, and will always do so. But there is something on his mind at present; he is in doubt about something; more, I cannot say. You know he comes of an impulsive race, and if he should now, while he is young, lose control of his feelings and cease to take a healthy interest in life, then the family will die out. It would be a pity. I know that you have suffered, and more than most. I also have known suffering, and I should be proud if I could say I had borne my trials as well as you have yours. If, therefore, your daughter inherits her mother's courage and strength, it would be a good thing for the race. As yet I am not quite clear what we ought to do. But I wished to let you know my feelings, so that I might have you on my side. The interests of—our children, I had nearly said—are at stake. I always regard Ørlygur as my own son. And it will be a hard struggle, for neither of them, certainly not Ørlygur, must ever realize that we are taking any part."

The widow was calmer now. She looked earnestly at Ormarr's face, as if seeking to read his mind. Then she offered her hand. It was not trembling now.

"You can trust me," she said. "I do not know what it is that troubles Ørlygur, and I do not wish to know. It is enough for me if he continues to feel as he does for Bagga. But if he should desert her, it would kill her. And if he kills my daughter, then, as surely as there is a God in heaven, I will kill him!"

Ormarr started violently. "Woman!" he cried, "God forgive you!"

"I would not have said it—it slipped out," she went on apologetically. "Such words must seem strange in the mouth of an old woman. But I could not help it. You need have no fear of me; I shall do as you wish. You can trust me as long as I can feel that you are acting honestly. You are now, and I believe you will continue so."

Ormarr smiled.

"If I did not know it to be otherwise, I might think you were my sister," he said. Then, speaking more seriously, he continued:

"I should have preferred that you did not come back with us to Borg today. But there are a number of others coming, and after we have stood here talking so long it would perhaps excite remark if you were not to come. Anyhow, to prevent any danger to our plans, it would be best to keep Ørlygur and Bagga from coming together, at any rate by themselves—if it can be done quietly."

The widow nodded.

They walked back to the grave, where Runa and Snebiorg were waiting. Several others now approached, and the widow and her daughter were formally invited to accompany the party home to Borg.

Horses were then saddled, and they moved off, most of those remaining taking the road to Borg.

Meantime, Ørlygur had left the doctor and was riding on alone. He was deep in thought, and allowed his horse to pick its own way at its own pace. All respected his reserve, and he was left in peace.

The doctor had joined the party with Ormarr. The

widow and her daughter rode immediately in front, and Ormarr noted how the doctor's eyes dwelt on the girl. It appeared, from something the doctor let fall in conversation, that he was again in need of a housekeeper.

Ormarr was struck by a sudden idea, but shook his head a moment after.

"No," he thought; "it would be too dangerous."

The doctor was a widower, childless, and lived alone at the trading station, keeping only a girl to look after the house. And many stories were current as to the doctor and his housekeepers. Most of them left after a short time in the house, some of them going out of the country altogether, after which nothing was heard of them. It was also said that he drank in secret, and some believed him to be out of his mind. In any case, it was not a place for a respectable girl.

Ormarr was thinking hard as he rode along.

"She ought to stand the test," he muttered to himself. "And who knows—perhaps it might be the very thing. A chance that might not come again. . . ."

He found a pretext for entering into conversation with the doctor, and, slackening his pace by imperceptible degrees, managed to fall behind with him, in rear of the party.

It was not long before he had elicited from the doctor the confession that his latest housekeeper had indeed left him.

Ormarr laughed. "You've had quite a number of housekeepers these last few years."

"Yes," answered the other. "It is more and more difficult to find a respectable woman, and what I am to do now, I do not know. Do without, I suppose."

"I hope it is not as bad as all that," said Ormarr. "The work is not so very hard, I take it, and there are generally plenty of girls willing enough to take an easy post. I have an idea, by the way, that the widow there would like her daughter to go out into the world a little; if you like, I could speak to her about it."

The doctor was profuse in his thanks.

Then they changed the subject, and, whipping up their horses, rejoined the rest.

Later in the day Ormarr spoke to the widow.

"The doctor is in want of a housekeeper," he said. "What do you think?—would Snebiorg like to undertake the work?"

The widow looked at him searchingly.

"Bagga—housekeeper at the doctor's?" she said harshly. "Never! Never as long as I live!"

"Why not?" asked Ormarr quietly.

"You know well enough what is said about him."

"True," Ormarr returned. "I know his weakness where women are concerned, but I have never heard of his ever having gone to extremes. He is too soft and good-natured for that—certainly, he is no rogue. I do not think there is anything to fear. And you can, of course, rely on your daughter herself."

The widow was silent a moment.

"I suppose I must do as you wish," she said at length. "But I shall hold you responsible if any harm comes of it."

"I can understand that you do not quite like the idea. But Ørlygur is on friendly terms with the doctor, and always looks in there whenever he goes in to the station. And if the knowledge that the woman he loves is in the doctor's house, and the doctor's own advances, do not spur him to act on his own behalf, then the case must be worse than I had thought. I do not think there is any risk, really."

The widow sighed. She did not quite like the idea of Bagga being made use of in this fashion, and perhaps exposed to danger. But Ormarr reassured her.

"With God's help, all will go well," she said at last, and gave her consent.

Ormarr had no difficulty in arranging details, and it was settled that Bagga should take over her duties in the doctor's house next day.

CHAPTER VI

THE widow and her daughter rode home that evening in silence. Each was occupied with her own thoughts, and would not have found it easy to share them with the other.

The horses knew their way, and, despite the darkness, the journey was accomplished rapidly and without mishap. The animals seemed to know that the quicker they went, the sooner they would be able to rest.

Mother and daughter exchanged only a few trivial remarks as they unsaddled and turned the horses loose. They did not even trouble to light up, but went straight to bed.

They had lain in silence for some time, when Bagga's voice came suddenly out of the dark:

"Mother, why must I leave home?"

The widow was at a loss for an answer, and, to escape the question, pretended to be asleep.

Bagga fell to weeping softly. It seemed all so senseless and cruel—why should she leave home when she had no wish to go? Who could say if these strangers with whom she was to live would be kind to her or not? It hurt her to leave home at all—but her mother willed it so.

Worse than this was the thought that Ørlygur seemed changed. There was something in his look and manner which told her she was not the same in his eyes that she had been when last they had met—when he had given her the lamb. Her conscience had been uneasy on that day of the funeral—it was the funeral of her good friend, Guest the One-eyed; and yet she had been glad, thinking only that she would be sure to see Ørlygur again. She had hoped, too, that he would speak to her—perhaps even take her hand. But he had only given her a hasty greeting, and his handshake had been disappointing. She had been

careful herself to leave without bidding him farewell; she could not bear to take his hand again in that strange way. Was it because there were others present that he had been so strange? Or had he ceased to love her? If he could only know how she suffered, for all her brave attempts to seem unconcerned, then surely he would at least have given her one such look as that which had drawn them together at the first. But perhaps it was only sorrow at his bereavement that had made him look so unlike himself; perhaps next time they met all would be well again. Oh, it was wrong of her to be bitter and think the worst; God might well punish her for that. And she had sinned in going to the funeral with any other thought than that of mourning the loss of Guest the One-eyed.

So Bagga argued with herself, and made up her mind at last that if she bore her trials bravely, then God might again be merciful and grant her again the joy of feeling that she and Ørlygur were united in heart.

She ceased to weep. Her pure and innocent heart had found consolation in her simple thoughts. All would surely be well again. And as her mind dwelt on the remembrance of her lover, she ceased to see him as he had been today, and saw only Ørlygur as she had known him—the picture she had treasured in her heart.

At last all conscious thought faded away; she only saw him—saw his face, his figure; the smile that had made her so happy, and the look in his eyes that she loved. They went with her into dreams, and daylight found her with a serene and happy smile. And when her mother came to wake her, there was such quiet and innocent peace in the girl's face that the old woman's anxious look changed to a tearful smile as she whispered to herself:

"Surely she can come to no harm. The Lord would never let her suffer."

And, dressing quietly, lest she should wake her, the widow stole out to her work.

On waking, Bagga noticed at once that her mother was already up. She got out of bed herself, and, without mak-

ing any attempt to dress, sat down on the bed to think. Today she was to leave home. At first she half hoped it was all a dream, but in a moment she realized that it was the sad truth. And the question which had risen to her mind the night before came to her now again: Why should she go? Hitherto, her mother had never said anything about her going away from home; on the contrary, she had always felt that her mother would have been sorry to lose her. And then to decide on this so suddenly. . . . There must be some reason for it all—something they had not told her. She was to go as housekeeper to the doctor, a man she had never liked. From her first sight of him she had felt an instinctive aversion to him. His looks, his friendly advances, repelled her. But if her mother thought it best, that must be enough. And if her mother did not wish to tell her the reason for so thinking, there was no more to be said.

She would not ask.

Going out, she found her mother had just finished making the coffee. They talked with some restraint; it seemed awkward even to talk of little everyday things now. The widow was evidently distressed herself, and Bagga was on the verge of tears. From her manner, the mother judged that Bagga had determined not to ask the reason of her being sent away from home. This was as well, since it saved her the necessity of answering awkward questions; but, on the other hand, it puzzled her to think why her daughter should have refrained from asking.

The few necessary preparations for the journey were soon made, and a man came up to the house with the horse Bagga was to ride.

It was noticeable that at parting the widow carefully impressed upon her daughter not to hesitate in telling her all that happened—to let her know at once, if need be.

“It will be lonely here when you have gone, child,” she said.

Bagga burst into tears, but strove bravely to recover herself. The two women embraced, and the widow walked

beside the horse until they came to the stream. Here they stopped, and bade each other farewell tenderly.

"God be with you," said the mother earnestly. "Trust in Him, and keep yourself pure in soul and body. And, should it please Him to call me to Himself, remember that there is one beside myself who loves you."

Bagga blushed at her words, and warm joy filled her heart. Then, with a parting kiss, she touched her horse and rode across the stream.

The widow stood for some minutes waving to her. And when Bagga turned to look once more, before passing over the last ridge of hills that would shut out the sight of her home, her mother stood there still, a grey, forsaken figure on the autumn landscape. The sight went to her heart.

CHAPTER VII

ØRLYGUR had left the churchyard with a smile on his face after his unfriendly remark to the priest about Borgarfjall and silly sheep. But the smile soon vanished.

"That was childish of me," he reflected. "Whatever made me say it, I wonder? And now I suppose I shall have to scramble up there one day, and very likely break my neck. No need to do it really, of course. But, then, that would be rather mean again. I seem to be getting that way of late."

Suddenly he perceived the doctor standing before him.

"Two and two are four," said the latter, with a gleam of kindly mischief in his eyes.

Ørlygur looked up at him uncomprehendingly.

"Don't be offended," said the doctor. "But really, you know, any one could see that a man walking about with such a scowl on his face was not sorrowing for the dead. Looks much more as if he were busy with some mathematical problem or other."

Ørlygur tried to smile.

"How would you like to make the ascent of Borgarfjall?" he asked jestingly.

The doctor looked out over the valley, measuring distances with his eye.

"Shouldn't care about it, to tell the truth," he answered. "But if I had to, well, I should provide myself with a bottle of whisky, and empty it. Then, when the ground began to move a bit, I should just wait till the part where I stood—or lay—came uppermost, and the top of Borgarfjall under; it would be easy enough to just give a heave and roll down to it. Otherwise, I think I should wait till after death."

"But you don't believe in any life after death," said Ørlygur, smiling.

The doctor's manner changed abruptly. "I don't know," he said seriously. "Don't know what I do believe." Then, returning to his former mischievous tone, he went on: "Anyhow, I fancy whisky is a freethinker. And I sometimes feel the spirit moving me."

Ørlygur was smiling no longer. "What is it like to get drunk?" he asked.

The doctor looked at him searchingly, then laughed aloud.

"Well, it makes you somewhat foolhardy as a rule," he said. "And light-hearted, light-headed, and all the rest of it. Afterwards, it's apt to be the other way—heavy, you know, especially about the head. You've a charming frankness, by the way, young man, when it comes to asking delicate questions."

"Why should I not?" said Ørlygur quickly. "Would you prefer me to pretend I didn't know you drank?"

The doctor was somewhat taken aback. "No," he said; "I shouldn't. Your straightforwardness is one of your best qualities. You don't care for whisky, I know. But come over one day and get drunk on it—it will probably save you, at any rate for some time, from any risk of going that way yourself."

"I didn't feel any wish to try," said Ørlygur. "It just occurred to me, that was all."

They walked up and down in silence, Ørlygur looking straight before him, the doctor watching him covertly the while.

"Most likely a woman," he thought to himself. "In trouble of some sort, that's clear. And—funny thing, now I come to think of it, we've never heard anything about his being taken with any one up till now. Anyhow, why he should be troubled about anything in that line, I can't make out. She must be a fool who wouldn't have him and gladly. Hearts are a nuisance."

He murmured the last words half aloud, and sighed.

Ørlygur glanced at him. "What is it?" he asked.

"Eh? Only my heart, I said. It's the whisky's done it, you know. And I was thinking of the time when I hadn't yet given it the chance to get in and spoil things."

The doctor looked him fixedly in the eyes. Ørlygur stopped, met his gaze, then both lowered their eyes and walked on. After a little, the doctor spoke again, looking straight ahead of him.

"You're one of the few people I ever trouble to think of," he said. "Because I have an idea that you've some sort of friendly feeling for me. Heaven only knows why you should. Consequently, the least I can do for you is—not to warn you, but just to point out to you the rocks that upset my little voyage; then you can go round or steer headlong into them, just as you please."

He changed suddenly to a lighter tone. "I'm no hand at serious talk. And you're looking just now as if you'd just entered Holy orders. I think I'll go and find some one more amusing to talk to."

He offered his hand, and the grip he gave belied his words. Ørlygur understood that the other had gone in order to leave him to himself. And he was grateful.

For a while he walked about by himself. Then, noticing that the others were saddling up, he found his horse, and rode with the party, but in silence, keeping to himself. He noticed the priest among the party, and fancied he marked an unfriendly look in his face. But it did not trouble him. On reaching home, he let his horse go loose, and wandered about by himself, leaving Ormarr and Runa to entertain their guests.

All that afternoon he wandered restlessly about, either keeping to himself or going from group to group, exchanging brief remarks occasionally with some, answering others with a word or so, often without being properly aware of what had been said. All saw that he was troubled and distraught.

He saw that Bagga was among the guests, but she was not alone, and he made no attempt to speak to her. And yet, time and again when he lost sight of her for a moment,

he could not rest till he had found her again. It was a consolation to look at her, to see that she was there.

When the widow and her daughter rode away, Ørlygur took care to be at hand when the horses were saddled. He hoped Bagga would come up and speak to him. But she pretended not to notice him, though he was sure she must have seen him.

At that, his misery overcame him, and he went to bed without saying good-night to any one. But he could not sleep. He heard the others come up to bed, and could hear their regular breathing through the thin partition between the rooms. The idea of sleep irritated him. What was sleep?—a giving up of the mind to nothingness. A thing unworthy of human beings. Surely it was the outcome of indifference, idleness, an evil habit that had grown through generations—a kind of hereditary vice.

He lay long restless, letting his thoughts come and go.

Then he became aware of a strange sound somewhere in the house. Music—somewhere a melody seemed filtering through the air, calling his thoughts back from their wanderings.

It must be Ormarr playing. Ørlygur dressed softly and stole out of the room. As he neared the door of the room where he had watched the night before with the dead, the sound grew clearer—it was there Ormarr had chosen to play.

He stood still and listened.

He did not know the melody, but its indescribable softness and melancholy soothed his mind. If Ormarr were playing for his own consolation, he was also comforting another and bringing peace to a troubled heart. Ørlygur listened, letting the music work upon his mind. And gradually he forgot himself entirely; that which had been himself disappeared, and there was something else—there was life, a precious thing. It was worth living for, only to feel this enthrallment of the moment; to realize this harmonious blending of joy and sorrow, of life and death blending, as it were, into a golden mist, and melting into eternity.

The last notes died away. Ørlygur crept back to his room, and slept.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Ørlygur awoke next morning he felt ill at ease. The sense of mental balance he had gained from the music of the night before seemed far off, and he had difficulty in recalling it.

But at the same time the feeling of utter despair that he had felt, especially after his vain attempt to speak at the graveside, had left him.

"Strange," he murmured. "But the promise—it seems now as if it no longer existed, after I failed to utter it then."

And he smiled bitterly.

"Was I really so weak?" he thought.

He dressed and went out. The sky was overcast, and the landscape, now deprived of the brightness of the sun, looked dead and gloomy, as if waiting only for the white wrappings of the snow to sink into the long frozen sleep of winter.

For the first time, Ørlygur felt the approach of winter as something threatening and to be feared. And involuntarily his thoughts turned to the spring that lay beyond. His heart beat fast as he pictured to himself the joy that comes with spring—the joy of seeing green things spring up out of the earth, the poor little blossoms of the rocky hills, the flight of white and many-coloured butterflies, the light nights, and the clear, smooth water of lakes set free from their murky covering of ice. He longed for the spring to come, and longed to share his joy in it with another.

His love for Bagga welled up in him like a spring torrent triumphant over the grip of winter, carrying all before it. It was this feeling which had been slumbering beneath his faint-hearted thoughts, and now it rose and swept all else from his mind.

"Why did I not speak to her yesterday?" he asked himself, in bitter self-reproach. "Why did I not go to her when she

stood there weeping by the grave? What madness was it that made me greet her as if she had been a stranger? And she saw it—saw I was changed, and that was why she would not bid me farewell. If only I have not hurt her beyond healing! How can I ever explain—how can I tell her of this mysterious power that has overwhelmed me until now? She would not understand it all—and if I do not tell her all, she will see that I am keeping something back. It may be that I have ruined everything—that she can never love me now. How could I ever dream of carrying on my father's work? It was an impulse sent from hell, and changeable and weak as I am, I let it take possession of me. I, who am so little able to control myself that I answered with boyish rudeness when the priest spoke to me—he meant well enough, no doubt. I can see myself that I am but a fool—how much more a fool should I appear to others if I were to go out attempting to teach others the way to peace.”

Again his thoughts turned to Bagga. He was filled with a sudden desire to go and see her, now, at once. Yet he did not move. Something seemed to hold him back.

He hated himself for his irresolution and want of firmness. But there was something he felt he must do before he sought her; what it was, he knew not.

His gaze wandered, as if seeking a solution. And suddenly his eyes rested on Borgarfjall.

“That was it!” he said to himself. “I told the priest. . . . But it was only in jest. . . .”

He stood thinking.

“Perhaps the priest will remind me of it some day. Or tell others—and I shall be looked on as a braggart. I could never bear it. Bagga might try to stop me if I made the attempt, but if she heard I had vowed to do it and drawn back she would never think the same of me again. It would pain her; she would feel ashamed. And that must never be.”

He decided to act at once. He would climb Bargarfjall the next day. And the idea of danger crossed his mind; perhaps he would never see her again.

But the mere possibility of this was unendurable—never

to see her again. It was too dreadful to be a possibility at all. No; it could not be but that he would come back safely to her after all.

And the more he thought, the more he felt certain of success. Here at last was something real to grapple with, something material, and he felt more confident in himself. No more fighting in the dark against thoughts and fancies, but a trial of physical strength and endurance.

That it was but a caricature of his former lofty project never once occurred to him—he would hardly have understood it in that light. His nature was one that craved real hardships to encounter; he was not of the stuff to fight with figments of the brain.

He would do it. He would start tomorrow. And, meanwhile, how was he to pass the rest of today?

Suddenly he thought of the doctor. A talk with him would be good medicine to shake off idle fancies. Yes, he would ride over and see the doctor.

And this time he saddled his horse without a trace of hesitation, and rode off to the trading station.

CHAPTER IX

THE doctor was in unusually good spirits when Ørlygur arrived.

He had good reason to be pleased with himself; not only had he found a housekeeper in place of the last, who had left him without notice, but he had found the most beautiful girl in the parish to succeed her.

And if ever there was a man who knew how to appreciate good looks in his housekeeper, it was Jon Hallsson, the doctor.

Ørlygur was unaware of the direct cause of his friend's good humour, and when the doctor invited him to stay and sample the new housekeeper's cooking, he accepted without ever dreaming—and without asking—who the new housekeeper might be. The doctor was always changing his folk, and Ørlygur was not interested in the subject.

"If you've come to try my whisky, why, you couldn't have chosen a better time," said the doctor gaily. "I'm just in the humour for a bout today—after dinner, that is."

Ørlygur shook his head.

"I have given up the whisky idea," he said, with a laugh. "Not only because I don't really care for it, but it throws one off one's balance too easily. No; I have found something else."

"Oh? And what may that be?"

"Mountaineering."

The doctor laughed. "I prefer the whisky," he said. "It elevates the mind without moving the body, and the fall is thus less painful."

"No need to fall at all," suggested Ørlygur.

"If you are still thinking of going up Borgarfjall, I should say there's every chance of it," returned the other.

"I am," said Ørlygur. "I am going up tomorrow, to build that cairn."

The doctor looked at him.

"Surely you are not serious?" he said.

"Indeed, I am," answered Ørlygur. And with a smile he added: "I want to get up and look about a little—see something of the world."

"If only you don't find yourself seeing something of another world—one that your friend the priest seems to know such a lot about."

In vain the doctor pointed out the difficulties and dangers of the project. Ørlygur was accustomed to mountain-climbing, and was obstinate. He must and would make the ascent.

"Must," repeated the doctor. "What nonsense!"

"It is simply this—if I don't do it, I shall have made a fool of myself in the eyes of that priest. I don't know how you would like that as an alternative."

"Oh, if that's the case, I've nothing more to say. I'd rather drink off a bottle of sulphuric acid at once than let that fool crow over me."

"Well, then, that's enough," said Ørlygur. "Let's talk of something else. I came over this evening because I wanted livening up a little."

"Very nice of you, I'm sure, to credit me with any ability that way. Suppose we try something to eat for a start."

They went into the dining-room and sat down. A moment later the door from the kitchen was opened, and Snebiorg entered with a soup tureen on a tray. At sight of Ørlygur she stopped, and hesitated. Then she looked down and blushed, but came forward and set down the soup on the table. Ørlygur had risen, but said nothing. All the merriment had vanished from his face, leaving him serious and astonished. The doctor was looking at the girl, and did not perceive the change which had come over his guest.

"My new housekeeper," he said, still without looking at Ørlygur. "A beauty, isn't she? And if my nose doesn't deceive me, she knows how to cook." And he stroked her arm.

"How dare you touch me!" cried the girl, and, flushing more hotly than before, she left the room.

“Ah, a bit stand-offish, it seems,” said the doctor complacently. “But none the worse for that.” And he turned towards his guest.

He caught but one glimpse of Ørlygur’s furious face; next moment a violent blow under the jaw sent him headlong to the floor.

He rose slowly, staring in profound astonishment, felt himself as if to ascertain what damage had been done, and then appeared perfectly calm once more.

“Good thing I was sitting down,” he said, with a touch of humour. “Not so far to fall, anyway. Handy with your fists, young man, I must say. Well, no reason to let the soup get cold. So you’re taken with her, too—why, so much the better, then we’re agreed. And seeing we’ve no difference of opinion on that head, I can’t see why you find it necessary to knock me down. I’m not a fighting man myself—very nice to watch, of course, when you’re not in it yourself, but otherwise . . . Why couldn’t you tell me how matters stood? Your girl, not to be touched, and so on. Much nicer, you know, between friends, than landing out suddenly like that. Anyhow, I don’t mind admitting that the—er—hint was direct enough. Enough for me, at any rate. Peaceable character, you know, and not as young as I used to be. I’m not particularly scrupulous as to rights of property in that sort of goods generally, but seeing it’s you, and we’re friends in a way—no more to be said. And since you’re determined on breaking your neck tomorrow, I daresay you’ll forgive me for hoping you may succeed. If I were in your place, I’d let a dozen priests think and say what they pleased, as long as I kept the girl, rather than go ramping off trying to cut out eagles and all the fowls of the air by clambering up to places never meant to be reached without wings—unless she asked you to, of course. If she asked me, I’d do it ten times over and reckon it cheap at that. I suppose it’s a secret, though, or your respected foster-father would hardly have arranged for his daughter-in-law to come here as house-keeper. Her mother wouldn’t have let her, I know.”

"Snebiorg and I are engaged," answered Ørlygur calmly. "It is a secret, that is true, known only to ourselves, and now, of course, to you. . . ." Ørlygur was surprised to find himself lying with such ease. "But I hope you will keep it to yourself now you do know."

"My dear fellow"—the doctor stroked his chin reflectively—"you've no call to be anxious—not in the least. I'm not likely to gossip about a thing like that. But, Lord, if you knew how sincerely I hope you may break your neck to-morrow."

"I shan't bear you any grudge for that," answered Ørlygur, in the same light tone. "But I'm very much afraid you'll be disappointed. I never felt fitter in my life."

"I've no doubt as to your fitness," answered the doctor, "after the practical illustration you gave me just now. But as to getting up there—as long as there's no sign of wings sprouting out from your shoulder-blades, I would suggest that you're a fool to try it, all the same."

Ørlygur shook his head.

"Well, well, it's your own affair."

They had finished dinner, and as they rose from the table, Ørlygur, according to custom, offered his hand to his host. The doctor grasped it heartily.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, and went out into the kitchen, closing the door behind him.

Snebiorg was in the kitchen; she had not appeared in the dining-room after the soup.

"I want to ask your pardon," he said frankly. "I promise you it shall not occur again. Until this moment I had no idea that you were a friend of Ørlygur à Borg. He is a good friend of mine, and I hope you also will regard me as a friend."

Snebiorg looked at him at first with some distrust; she had never liked the man. But there was a certain shyness in his manner now, and a kindly tenderness in his eyes, altogether different from his former attitude towards her. And she could not but feel he was sincere.

She made no answer, but he noticed the altered look in her face, and, greatly relieved, he went back to Ørlygur and led him to the sitting-room.

"I've been out to beg pardon," he said, offering a box of cigars. "She'll be as safe here with me now as with her mother. And if you think it's only because you knocked me down just now, you're wrong."

Ørlygur looked at him doubtfully.

"I know what you're thinking of," the doctor went on. "My promise wouldn't count for much when I've been drinking, eh? But there's just a bit of my heart that the whisky hasn't altogether spoiled as yet."

He glanced up at a large picture of his dead wife on the wall. There were other portraits of her about the room. And his eyes were moist.

Ørlygur was moved, and held out his hand.

Then the whisky was brought out, but Ørlygur declined; the doctor poured out a glass for himself. They sat for a while in silence, each busy with his own thoughts.

Ørlygur could not get over his astonishment at meeting Snebiorg in the doctor's house, and in particular at the news that it was Ormarr who had arranged for her to come. It troubled him, also, that her mother had been willing to let her come at all.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him—here, perhaps, was the solution of it all.

"Trying to make me jealous—that must be it. And not a bad idea. If I had any doubt in my own mind before, this has certainly made an end."

He glanced at his host, wondering whether he, too, was in the plot. The doctor seemed to perceive that he was being scrutinized.

"Ørlygur," he said, in a strangely quiet voice, "I wonder what ever made you care about me at all? I've had a feeling ever since I've known you that you had a sort of liking for me. But, how you ever could, I can't imagine."

Ørlygur looked at him a moment, and then glanced away.

"If you want to know," he said, "it's not for any one

reason in particular, but several. To begin with, you're always the same to rich and poor. . . . Indeed, I've heard that you often treat poor people for nothing, and give them medicines into the bargain."

"That's nothing," said the doctor, waving his hand carelessly.

"And, then, you stay in a poor place like this, instead of finding somewhere where you could make a better position."

"Mere selfishness on my part," said the doctor. "My wife lived here; it was here I met her—here we lived for the one short year we had together. . . . Yes, I daresay it may seem almost blasphemous for me to talk like that, seeing what every one knows about my life generally. But it's true, all the same. That's why I stay on here."

Ørlygur sat looking straight before him. "It's just those trifles—and that one thing you call selfishness that made me like you," he said softly.

Both were silent. Then the doctor reached out for his glass, and emptied it. And, without appearing to address Ørlygur directly, he went on:

"Sitting here by myself, I often think how queerly fate weaves her threads. Something's happening every moment—things happening that matter to some one or other. Only, I'm outside it all; just sit here and look on. Like the carcase of a fly that the spider Life has left hung up in a corner of the web."

He poured out a fresh glass, and laughed.

"Sit here drinking whisky and never move. Never get any farther. I won't say my life's been worse than many others in the way of troubles. I may feel so at times, but it's just weakness on my part. Here I have a comfortable room to sit in, an arm-chair, and something to drink. And there's many that are out in the cold. Possibly I may be as lonely and unhappy as they. But at least I can live in something like material comfort. I'm not starving, for instance. Altogether, I must be a poor sort of fellow not to be more content than I am, and go steady, instead of sinking deeper and deeper into drink. Sometimes I've thought of

committing suicide. But when I go over the pros and cons, it seems better to go on living. I don't expect death to bring me anything better. And I suppose I'm doing a certain amount of good while I'm alive. Though, on the other hand, I do some harm. Heaven knows why—my nature, I suppose."

He looked up suddenly.

"Getting dark," he said.

Twilight had fallen; already it was hard to distinguish objects in the room. The two men saw each other's faces only as pale spots in the dark. The doctor rose to light the lamp.

Ørlygur rose also.

"Don't trouble. I'm going home now," he said. "I shall have to be up early tomorrow."

The doctor followed him out to his horse, that was loose in the enclosure. Ørlygur saddled up, and took his leave; there was a curious, thoughtful expression on his face. A moment after, he dismounted again, and, handing the reins to the doctor, who was waiting to see him ride off, he went into the kitchen, where a light was burning.

He closed the door after him as he entered, and looked into Bagga's eyes, that were red and swollen with tears.

"How did you come here?" he asked in a low voice.

"I don't know," answered Bagga calmly. "Mother said I was to come. And I would not disobey her."

"I have told the doctor we are engaged," he said, in the same low tones.

She nodded, as if agreeing it was the natural thing to do.

Then Ørlygur's heart was filled with an endless joy, and a proud yet gentle smile lit his face. He opened his arms and drew her to him. For a moment they stood there, held close in each other's arms. Then Ørlygur looked into her eyes and said:

"I am going up to the top of Borgarfjall, to build a cairn there. And then I shall come and fetch you."

She nodded again, with the same expression of quiet understanding. Then their lips met in a long kiss. Ørlygur felt

his head grow dizzy, and it was not till he found himself galloping away on his horse that he recovered.

"If I fail tomorrow," he thought to himself, "I am a scoundrel. But I must build that cairn."

And after a while he murmured half aloud, with an air almost of disappointment:

"She didn't seem in the least impressed—took it as if it were nothing at all."

CHAPTER X

JON HALLSSON was standing deep in thought when Ørlygur dashed out of the kitchen, snatched the reins out of his hands, and galloped off without a word or look in farewell.

"He's in a hurry to go off and break his neck," he thought, and added: "I wonder he doesn't give up that mad idea. With a girl like that . . ."

Then he went indoors, hoping that he might remain undisturbed that night.

When Jon Hallsson had settled down to drink in the evening, he did not like to be called out. But his drinking had never interfered with his work; some people even went so far as to say that they would rather have him slightly drunk than perfectly sober. Strangely enough, despite his weakness in respect of drink and women, he had never lost the respect of those about him. He was a clever doctor, and kind to the poor; he talked straight out, like a man—at times a little too much so. And so people liked him. After all, it was no concern of theirs how he lived or what he made of his life. There was only one man who detested him, and that was the priest. But the latter was not so popular among his flock that he could venture to give vent to his feelings beyond an occasional remark.

Jon Hallsson was from another part of the country, but had held his present post for fifteen years. When he had first come to the place, he had been unmarried, and the district at Hofsfjordur was regarded as merely a stepping-stone to a better. He was looked on by his colleagues as a man who would certainly rise in his profession.

Shortly after his arrival, he had married a beautiful young girl, the daughter of a farmer in the neighbourhood. She

died in childbirth within the year, and the child immediately after.

The blow had crushed him utterly, leaving only a shadow of his former self. He filled the house with pictures of his dead wife, and dwelt on them, clinging to memories as a stricken bird to its nest. But his physical cravings would not be denied. And he was not strong enough to master them. Little by little he gave way, and though at times he realized that he was sinking, he had not power to check himself. Other young men in his profession rose beyond him, while he grew more and more hopeless of ever advancing at all. He was like a pebble in the river of life; once it had come to a stop, the stream flowed over and past it, wearing away every projecting corner that could give a hold, until gradually it became surrounded by other stones, and the way for further progress was blocked and it sank down to insignificance in the lowest of the mass.

Jon Hallsson lit the lamp and sat down to drink. He could hear Snebjorg busy in the dining-room, and in a little while she came in to tell him that his tea was ready.

"Thanks," he said, and did not move. As she went to the door, he added: "You need not wait to clear away the things. Go to bed when you like. Good-night."

For a long time he sat in silence. Then, as was his way when he had been drinking for some time, he began talking to himself. It was as if the silence became unendurable.

"Nonni," he said, using the pet name by which his wife had always called him—"Nonni, my boy, it's time for bed. Getting late, and the lamp will want filling soon. And you don't like sitting in the dark, do you? And the oil's down in the cellar, and you'd go headlong to the bottom if you tried them. Much as you can do to stand on your legs now. But there's a candle . . ."

He emptied his glass and filled it again.

"My friend, you drink like a fish. Drink a lot too much. No earthly need for that last glass. Too much whisky's a bad thing anyway. And there's no need to empty the bottle each time. There's a deal left now, but if I'm not

mistaken you'll finish it before you turn in tonight. And then, my boy, you will be drunk. And do all sorts of mad things. But kindly remember—the door where that girl sleeps is not to be touched. Not even touch the handle. No."

He rose with difficulty and took down a large photograph of his wife.

"Best to do it now," he said. "While you've some sense left. There's a hammer in the surgery."

He stumbled out of the room, and nailed up the picture of his wife on the door at the foot of the stairs that led to Snebiorg's room.

"Ragna," he said, "keep guard over that door for me, will you? You know what I am when I've had too much. Do all sorts of mad things. But mustn't go up there. Not up there—no. You guard the door, Ragna. Yes."

Then he stumbled back to his arm-chair and his glass.

"There you are, my boy; now you can carry on for a bit. Couldn't get to sleep now anyhow. Not eleven yet. And there's lots of things to think of yet."

He took a long drink and laughed.

"Fount of youth—serves up the same old thoughts as if they were new. Night after night—chewing the cud of old thoughts. Nonni, my boy, you're a ruminating animal. Sad, isn't it? Well, what does it matter? Heaps of people do the same. Chew the cud of their sorrows and joys, and their trifles, and their love—yes, ha ha, love, of course. Nice word for something else. . . . There, now you're being a beast. And if you are, you needn't make out all the world's the same. You knew something about love yourself, once . . . blubbering, Nonni—whisky going to your eyes, what? Dry up, do; it won't make things any better. Can't stand one bottle—you're getting out of form. Well, well, here's the last glass for tonight. Not too much soda this time—stiff one to make you sleep. Only think, if one could drop off to sleep and out of it all. Well, well, that'll come too before long, never fear. Nuisance that you can't take a light with you when you go. Nasty to wake up in the dark when you're

dead. What nonsense—you don't wake up when you're dead. . . . Anyhow, it's nothing to be afraid of, Nonni, my boy. Well, off we go—walk steady, now. Those stairs . . . but we weren't going up those stairs. . . . And why not, I should like to know? Fine girl there waiting . . . and the other young fool, he'll break his neck . . . finest girl I've set eyes on for many a long day."

He staggered from the room, and out to the staircase door, where his wife's picture hung.

"What the—good Lord, it's Ragna! I'm sorry, Ragna—first time you've . . . Oh, I remember now. Well, well, there's no going that way. No, I shouldn't have . . . no . . . Good-night, Ragna."

He turned towards his own room next to the surgery. "That's right, Nonni, boy—that's the way. Leave the girl alone. Heart? Never mind your heart—nothing to do with the heart really, you know. Not that sort of thing. . . . This way, boy. That's right."

He went into his own room, and stumbled into bed. For a long time he lay awake, muttering to himself. At last, when the candle had burnt down and the room was in darkness, he gradually lapsed into sleep.

CHAPTER XI

IT was still dark next morning when Ørlygur rose, dressed, and silently stole out from the house. He took with him a thirty-foot rope that he had procured the day before, and some food. Then, taking the well-known path up to the mountains, he set off through the darkness.

His dog went with him.

Ørlygur was perfectly calm, without a thought for the perilous nature of his undertaking. He was thinking that he would first have to reach the highest ledge, and get a proper view of the peak, before he could see how to manage the rest.

All he had to do for the present was to husband his strength both physically and mentally, so as to have plenty in reserve for the final and most difficult part. He was a good walker; if only he kept his wind and did not strain himself, he would be fit enough after a short rest for the last climb to the summit.

He walked on steadily, and by daybreak he had reached the third ridge. He told himself that he had been going quite slowly; a child could have walked as far in the time. He could safely try a little faster now, and get as far as possible in the cool of the morning. Without hastening his step, he lengthened his stride a little. As he ascended, the ridges came closer and closer in succession, and he had reached the seventh when he felt the first rays of the sun. For a moment he rested, watching the sunrise. Only three more ridges now, and he would be at the base of the peak.

He glanced at the village below. Here and there he could distinguish people afoot; tiny figures they seemed, viewed from where he stood. The valley was still in shadow, and all its colours, except that of the ruddy heather, seemed dull and vague. Even the surface of the water was grey, in places almost leaden in hue.

He waited only a little while and then resumed his steady climb. At length the stone buttress of the peak rose directly before him, standing up sheer in places, at others with a slight slope.

He walked along the foot. It was no easy ascent, that was clear. The vertical rifts in the massive rock offered no pathway up, and the horizontal clefts and ledges were far apart, with a distance of some ten to twenty feet between.

After some time spent in examining the face of the rock he was still as far as ever from perceiving any practicable way. He came to a standstill, with his eyes fixed vacantly on the rock before him.

"Anyhow, it has to be done," he muttered.

And, pulling himself together, he shook off the feeling of despair that was threatening. He found a sunny spot where there was a clear trickle of water, and lay down in the heather.

"First something to eat, then a rest, and then another look round," he thought to himself. "I can surely find a way up there somehow." And, taking out the food he had brought with him, he began to eat.

He was perfectly calm. They would not be anxious about him at home, even if he were not back till late at night. He had stated beforehand that he believed some sheep had strayed far up on to the topmost plateau, and must look for them; all knew that it would be a lengthy business to get a couple of obstinate sheep down from the top of the mountain, so they would not expect him back early.

He ate his food without haste, and then lay resting for half an hour, thinking of anything but the business in hand. Then, perceiving that he was beginning to feel drowsy, he sprang up resolutely and walked briskly round the face of the rock.

"You and I have a little matter to settle between us," he said gaily, nodding up at the wall of stone.

He found he could walk round on three sides; the fourth, that towards the northward, was too steep, and the loose sand there rendered it still more difficult to find any foot-

hold. To try there would mean going down rather than up. The rock here sloped down from the top of the peak to about half-way down the side; Ørlygur had thought of coming down that way, but he realized that in places the angle was too abrupt; he would inevitably lose his footing and go crashing down. It was this which had led him to take a rope, thinking it might be of some assistance here. Twice he walked round the three sides of the rock. But there was no cleft anywhere that went right to the top. Already he felt his courage failing, and, fearing to lose it altogether, he boldly commenced climbing up the cleft which seemed to lead farthest up.

Before starting, however, he coiled the rope round him so as to be easily got at if required. Then he began scrambling up the narrow cleft. It was a difficult path, at times the cleft seemed to vanish altogether; in other places it widened out so that it was impossible to keep his footing on both sides at once.

The dog, finding it could no longer follow, began howling pitifully. Ørlygur scolded the animal impatiently, but only succeeded in making matters worse; the dog ran backwards and forwards along the base, trying to find some way up. But all its efforts were in vain, and at last it returned to the bottom of the cleft up which Ørlygur had started, and lay there, nose in air, and howling miserably, only desisting now and again to look up at its master with sorrowful eyes.

Ørlygur made but slow progress in the ascent. Still, it was better than he had thought. But more than once, after passing some particularly awkward spot, he reflected that he would never be able to get down without the aid of the rope.

He was unwilling to think of what he would do if the cleft now suddenly came to an end; the thought occurred to him constantly, but he thrust it aside, and went on steadily. But he knew it could not be for long.

Where the cleft was more than usually narrow, he set his back against one side, and hands and feet against the other, carefully hoisting himself up and making sure of his hold with one foot and hand before moving the other.

Where it was wider, or almost disappeared, he clung tightly to the side, testing the rocky points that jutted out before trusting his weight to them. At times he had but just time to get a grip with his hands, when his foothold gave way. Then, clinging tightly with his fingers, he had to feel about with his feet for a rest before shifting his grip. Inch by inch, by the exercise of all his strength and all his will, he climbed on, until at last he reached a ledge that allowed him a much-needed rest. He looked down at the way he had come, but the sight made him dizzy, and he hastily averted his eyes. It seemed incredible that he should have come up there; from where he was, the rock seemed to fall away inwards beneath him. He determined not to look back again; he felt that if he did so he would never reach the top. He turned instead to a scrutiny of the way before him.

A cold sweat broke out on him as he realized that the cleft he had been climbing ran but some ten or twelve feet more, making perhaps a sixth part of the height.

But the ledge, he remembered, continued to the left, in a series of jutting crags, until it reached another vertical cleft running right to the top. One thing was clear: it would be impossible to pass along the ledge with the rope coiled round his body; the path was far too narrow, and if the rope should catch on any projecting point he would be thrown off his balance.

Another thing was borne in upon him now—that to think overmuch about the task before him was more dangerous than all else. Without more ado, he loosened the rope and let one end fall, fastening the other carefully to the rock on which he was seated.

Where it was possible to get along the ledge, it would surely be possible to come back the same way, he thought. It was only in the actual descent that the difficulties were greater. And if he came to any point that was absolutely impassable, he could always give it up and return—"Perhaps," he added, with emphasis.

Little by little he made his way along the ledge, depend-

ing at times upon the grip of his hands alone, with his body entirely unsupported. First a firm grip with the one hand and then a careful search with the other for a fresh hold. All his thoughts were concentrated upon his hands and their hold. When at length he had reached the flat rock that he had been making for, he found himself exhausted for the moment. He closed his eyes, and allowed his whole body to relax for a brief respite.

It gave him some relief; when he opened his eyes again, he felt as if he had slept. Once more he recommenced his perilous way, creeping carefully and with every nerve strained, to the next projecting rock. This brought him to the commencement of the upward cleft he had in mind. The first part was an easy slope, and could be managed well enough; higher up, however, it grew steeper. Ørlygur realized that, even if he succeeded in getting up, it would be almost impossible to get down again. For a moment he considered whether it would not be better after all to go back for the rope, but he gave up the idea at once. The passage along the ledge was one he felt he had not strength now to repeat. And with the rope round his body it would mean almost certain disaster to attempt it. Losing no time in further reflection, he started up the cleft.

At first all went well. Then came a stretch of smooth rock rising straight up on either side. The slightest false move here would be fatal, and there were some ten or twelve feet of it to be covered. How he managed it, he never quite knew, and from this point onwards he moved unconsciously, knowing nothing of his own progress until he found himself lying, exhausted and breathless, at the summit. His clothes were torn, his hands bleeding and bruised, and there was a cut on one knee. The keen mountain air refreshed him, and he lay quietly drinking it in before rising to his feet. He remembered now how he had been on the point of slipping at that last stretch of smooth rock, and, nerved by fear, had made a superhuman effort. It had been muscle acting without brain, for his mind had been a blank at the time. But it was done now. After that terrible moment, the last

part of the way had been easier, and he had not stopped to think.

After resting for a little, he went to the edge and peered over. Now that he was here, he felt no sensation of dizziness as when he had looked down before. But it was evident beyond doubt that it would be certain death to attempt to descend by the way he had come.

Still, here he was. And down he must get somehow.

He was terribly thirsty, and looked around for water. After some searching he found a tiny spring, clear and cold as ice. A little moss grew round about it, in beautifully varying shades of green. He lay down and drank, rested and drank again, till his thirst was quenched and he felt himself refreshed. Then he rose.

"And now for that monument!" he cried gaily.

He had only his bare hands to work with, and they were bruised and sore, but there was no lack of material at hand; rocks of all sorts and sizes lay strewn about. He chose, first of all, a big flat stone as a foundation, looking first to see that its position was such as to render the cairn visible from the valley below, and set to work building up carefully with suitable pieces. After a couple of hours' work, the thing was done—a compact pile of stone, tapering from a broad base evenly towards the top. On this he placed a large flat stone spreading out like the brim of a hat, and above it a smaller one again.

When the work was finished, he patted the stone with his hand, and laughed.

"There you are," he said. "Now, see and stay there as long as you can, for I doubt if any one will come to set you up again if you fall."

Then, putting on his jacket, which he had laid aside for the work, he commenced to walk round the little platform which formed the summit of the peak. On three sides the rock fell away sheer; on the fourth was a steep slope of loose sand mixed with a soft kind of rock. Here and there were hard projections of lava and stone. To miss one's foothold there would mean rolling down, with the first stop

some eight hundred feet below. And, likely as not, the rolling would develop into a series of bouncing leaps, breaking very bone in one's body.

Ørlygur noted half-absently that it was no use trying to get down on this side. Then he sat down and gazed out over the valley below. The land merged into the horizon on all sides save the north-east, where the sea showed a leaden-grey surface, broken in places by white-topped breakers. To the south were snow-capped hills, that seemed more like part of the sky than earth, their glittering surface seeming out of keeping with the dark hues of the lower land. A bank of fog came gliding in from the sea, clear of the bottom of the valley and not touching the mountain heights, making a weird effect. Ørlygur found himself suddenly looking down from clear air into a sea of fog two hundred feet below, that hid the valley from view. He looked down the mountain-side. It seemed far less formidable now that the fog obscured the greater part. And he rose with a sudden impulse to try the descent now while it was less dangerous.

"How stupid," he said to himself a moment later. "Of course, it is dangerous as ever. Still, I must try it. No use trying to go down the way I came up; it would be no better than jumping off the edge. The sandy slope on the other side is my only chance; I must try to get off it as soon as I can find a ledge, and take my chance of slipping before I strike one."

He took off his shoes and stockings, and removed his coat. At first he thought of throwing them over on the side where he had come up, but on second thoughts he refrained. To look over there now might make him nervous. He left his things lying where they were.

"The stones will be rough, with bare feet," he reflected. "But if I get back safely . . ."

Carefully he surveyed the slope, and marked out his path. Then, lying flat down, he thrust his feet over the edge. For a fraction of a second he paused, and then the struggle

commenced. To seek for secure foothold was hopeless; the only thing was to make the most of such resistance as the stones offered, and prevent himself from going down too fast. His eyes could only see where to place his hand; his feet must be left to feel their way. Every movement had to be made swiftly, and yet with the utmost care, and, above all, without losing coolness and self-control.

The actual distance to the first ledge was not great; it was not more than five minutes from starting when he glanced to the side and found himself level with it. But it seemed like ages. A little below him, and slightly to one side, a point of lava jutted out. Possibly it might be loose and give way at a touch; anyhow, it was all that offered, and there was no time to waste. Already he could fancy himself gliding past the ledge, and then . . .

Before he could recall his mind from this dangerous channel, his body had done all that was needed; he found himself grasping what proved to be the point of a large rock. Feeling it would hold, he drew himself up and threw one arm round it. This steadied him, and gave him a chance to rest. A few feet to one side was the ledge and safety. But to reach it across the few intervening feet of loose ground seemed an impossibility. If he slipped but an inch or two beyond, it would be hopeless to try and work up again; he would go sliding down with but little chance of stopping himself.

Just then he heard his dog barking, but paid little heed.

No, there was nothing for it now but to make the attempt. But there seemed little hope of success.

The danger in no way unnerved him; on the contrary, the confronting of actual difficulty seemed to allure him. He would try—and then . . .

He closed his eyes and offered up a prayer. It was the first time he had done so throughout the undertaking. But the imminent peril of death compelled him, and his lips stammered out the old words. It was the age-old acknowledgment of the powers above—a tribute to darkness and the un-

known. He uttered the words earnestly, but it was none the less something of a formality. He was prepared to die; it was only to loosen the last tie that bound him. . . .

Before his prayer was ended, he was recalled to the present in startling wise.

"Hullo, there you are! Hung up nicely, by the look of you."

Ørlygur opened his eyes in astonishment. Jon Hallsson was there, on the ledge, in his shirt-sleeves, carrying a bag in his hand. The sweat poured down his face, which was flushed with unwonted exertion; he was so exhausted that he could hardly speak.

"Looks as though the best thing I can do's to go down again, and wait for you at the bottom of your beastly mountain. Though I'm not likely to be much use to you when you get there. Wish you were safely over here, don't you? Well, so do I, but how to get you there's another thing."

"You've come in the nick of time," cried Ørlygur merrily. All thought of death or danger seemed to have vanished. "But how did you find your way up?"

"I've been keeping an eye on the place—ever since this morning, watching through a telescope. First time I spied something moving on the top, I thought it must be an eagle. I hoped all along you'd have more sense. But when I saw the eagle building castles—sacrificial altars—on the topmost heights of pig-headed obstinacy, I took it that by some miracle or other you'd got here after all. So I packed up some tools and bandages and things, and came out to deal with a fine crop of fractures. But there's neither god nor devil would persuade me to come crawling out to where you are now."

"Don't want you to, I'm sure. Does any one know you've come up here at all?"

"No sense in telling them that I could see. At least, not till I'd made sure whether you were mincemeat or not."

"Have you a knife with you?"

"Sir—you insult me. Didn't I tell you I'd come out here prepared for operations generally?"

"Well, I wish you'd content yourself meantime with amputating an end of that rope I left hanging down near where the dog is. About twenty feet. Then, if you'll make one end fast where you are, and throw me the other, you'll have me safe and sound on the ledge beside you in a moment. Not that I'm in any hurry to get away from here, really—it's quite a comfortable place to rest a bit. But I've just discovered that I'm desperately hungry, and there's still some food left in my bag."

"Don't talk nonsense," retorted the doctor. "Rope, you say? I can't get it without climbing up that silly place, and I'm not an acrobat."

"Well, then, slip down to Borg and fetch another."

"Slip, indeed—very kind of you," snapped the doctor. And, followed by a merry laugh from Ørlygur, he turned back towards the cleft where the rope had been left, muttering curses on all foolhardy boys and this present escapade in particular.

A little later he returned with the rope in his hand. He seemed even more angry than when he had started.

"Risking my neck for your mad pranks," he grumbled. "I had to scramble up the rocks to cut it high enough—I hope you may hang yourself with it some day. Nearly got hung up myself. And came down with a run, and gave myself a most abominable bump at the end of it."

He did not say where he was hurt, but when he fancied Ørlygur was not looking he rubbed himself tenderly behind.

It was but a moment's work to make the rope fast, throw out one end to Ørlygur, and draw him slowly in on to the ledge.

"There! And now, where's the damage?" asked the doctor impatiently, by way of welcome.

"No damage up to now, thanks. But if you feel put out about it, I'll let you take off one leg at the knee for your trouble."

They made their way back to the rock where Ørlygur had

left his bag. The dog had not moved from the spot, and at sight of its master sprang towards him, greeting him with delight, and continued gambolling around, evidently overjoyed at finding him again.

While Ørlygur was eating, the doctor stared up at the rock and the rest of the rope hanging from the rock above. After a time he asked:

"The cleft seems to end there. I suppose you just flew the rest of the way?"

Ørlygur explained how he had made his way round the ledge. "It's easy enough," he declared. "You could drive a caravan round."

"But why on earth did you leave the rope behind?"

"Oh, I thought it would be more fun to get along hanging by my arms, with the rest of me in mid-air. Neater, you understand."

"I see. You're pleased to make a jest of your own infernal wickedness—for it's wicked, nothing less, to play the fool with life and death like that."

But Ørlygur only laughed and went on with his meal. The doctor continued his study of the rock, as if imagining himself making the ascent, and shuddered. Then, abandoning his ill-humoured tone, he turned to Ørlygur with tears in his eyes.

"Oh, you young fool!" he said. "Can nothing content you but roads that were meant for the eagles?"

"I'm going another road tomorrow," said Ørlygur, with a laugh.

The doctor looked at him doubtfully.

"Well, don't count on me this time," he said. "I'll not go dangling at your heels with an ambulance train every time you've a fancy to risk your neck."

"There's not much risk this time—not in that way, at least. I'm only going over to the station to carry off your housekeeper."

"And that's what I get for my pains—not to speak of subsequent complications," grunted the doctor. It was cool up there in his shirt-sleeves, and a recent bump made it un-

comfortable for him to sit down. But there was a note of relief in his voice as he spoke.

As soon as Ørlygur had finished eating, they started on their way down. It was sunshine the first part of the way, but a little farther down they found themselves enveloped in a bank of clammy fog. At a distance, Ørlygur's dog was magnified to the size of a calf, and well-known rocks became distorted and unrecognizable. Nevertheless, they found no difficulty in making their way down. The path was always just visible, and Ørlygur knew the track so well that he could have followed it blindfold. As they went on, the fog became thicker; the doctor's horse was nowhere to be seen. They searched for some time without success; they could hardly see an arm's length ahead. The saddle had been left beside the track, and this they discovered, but the horse was gone.

"We've always some horses in the paddock at home at this time of year," said Ørlygur. "You can take one of ours. I'll find yours tomorrow."

On arriving at Borg, Ørlygur at once caught one of the horses wandering loose, and put on the doctor's saddle.

"You'll come indoors and have a cup of coffee before you go on?" he said to the doctor.

"Thanks, I won't say no. And perhaps a drop of something stronger wouldn't be amiss. But catch a couple more horses while you're about it."

"What for?"

The doctor turned his head away, and answered a trifle sadly:

"No need to put off that business you were speaking of till tomorrow, is there?"

Ørlygur looked at him without a word.

"Besides, you'd be company for me on the way home. I don't feel like wandering about alone in this fog."

Ørlygur set off at once after two more horses, and tied up the three in readiness. Then the two men went indoors, and Ørlygur ordered coffee.

After a while Ormarr came in.

"What brings you here, doctor?" he asked.

Jon Hallsson made no reply, but glanced at Ørlygur. Ormarr followed his glance.

"And where have you been, Ørlygur?" he asked, noticing the boy's hands and clothing.

"I'd better go and change, I think," said Ørlygur awkwardly—"I've been up Borgarfjall," he added. "Up to the top." And he rose to his feet.

Ormarr looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Up Borgarfjall! And you, too, doctor?"

"No," answered the doctor, with emphasis. "No climbing to the top of Borgarfjall for me, thank you."

Ormarr turned to Ørlygur with a questioning look.

"What were you doing up there?"

"I thought a sort of monument would look nice on top."

"Sort of monument! . . ." Ormarr shook his head.

"But the top—the peak—it's more than any man could do to get there!"

"Exactly," said Ørlygur.

Ormarr and the doctor burst out laughing, in which Ørlygur joined. Then hurriedly he made his escape.

When he had left the room, Ormarr turned to the doctor.

"What does it all mean?" he asked.

"My dear Ormarr Ørlygsson, don't ask me. I have to thank you, by the way, for finding me a most excellent house-keeper."

"Oh," answered Ormarr, somewhat at a loss, "I just happened to know . . ."

"You just happened to know my little weakness," put in the doctor angrily.

Both men were silent for a moment. Then the doctor burst out laughing.

"Never been so done in all my life," he said in an injured tone.

"I'm very sorry," said Ormarr. "But it was the only way I could see to . . ."

"Oh, never mind. Most happy to reciprocate, if needed, and all that. But where am I to get another now?"

Ormarr's face lit up with a sudden gleam of pleasure. He was about to speak, when the doctor interrupted him.

"Yes, she is," he said sharply. "It's all settled. I've played my little part. And Ørlygur's going off now to fetch her."

Ormarr rose, laughing, and held out his hand.

"My dear doctor, let me congratulate you."

"Me!" snapped the other.

"Yes, you. A most rapid and satisfactory cure. If I can help you to find another housekeeper . . ."

"Thank you, I won't trouble you."

The doctor grasped Ormarr's hand cordially. "I'm just as pleased with the result as you can be, really," he said, with frank sincerity. "Ørlygur and I are rather friends, you know. But he is a headstrong young fool, all the same. You ought to go and look at that place where he went up."

"Then you were with him?"

"Not at the time—no. But from something he let fall last night, and seeing something moving up there today, I had an idea, and went up to see what he was doing."

"What's all this about a monument?"

"I don't know. But I fancy he wanted to relieve his feelings in some way—by doing something out of the ordinary, you understand."

Ormarr seemed to be thinking hard. Then he looked up.

"What makes you think so?" he asked.

"It's only an idea of mine. He is young, and full of energy. . . . But, of course, I may be wrong."

"I fancy you are right," said Ormarr. "More so, perhaps, than you imagine."

There was a pause. Ormarr was the first to speak.

"Look here," he said. "Let Ørlygur ride over now and fetch the girl, and you stay here for tonight. We have not seen much of each other up to now, but you have been a good friend to my son—my foster-son, that is. There are several things we two old fellows could find to talk about. Besides, you must be tired."

The doctor accepted the invitation, and when Ørlygur was ready to start, Ormarr went up to him.

"You will bring her home here, of course. But I think you ought to go round by Bolli, and bring her mother as well."

Ørlygur answered with a grateful glance and a nod. And no more was said.

Ormarr Ørlygsson and Jon Hallsson sat long talking together. Each sat by a window, watching the little streams of moisture that trickled down the panes.

The doctor seemed weary and in low spirits.

"I'm tired of life myself," he said. "Have been for years now. And yet I potter about trying to keep others alive, when I daresay they're just as tired of it as I am. Doesn't seem much sense in it anyway."

Ormarr shook his head.

"Life is a precious thing," he said. "And often we don't realize it until it is too late. Then we fall to musing dismally about it, instead of using our experience for the good of others—for those who are to come after us. We say to ourselves: I have suffered; so will they. Well, why not? Let them look after themselves. But why have we suffered? Because we are narrow-minded and ungrateful. Surely we have known some glorious moments; how can we complain of life after? Life is a round of ceaseless change, day and night, sunshine and rain; we ourselves pass from the unknown to the unknown again . . . and that is why a moment of harmony we call happiness is a wondrous thing—a thing that can never be paid for throughout all eternity."

"You may be right," said the doctor. "I feel myself an ungrateful creature at this moment."

"I have only felt that harmony myself at moments when I was able to forget myself entirely in my music," Ormarr went on. "And then it was really only a complete forgetfulness of all that was passing around me. How much greater must be the happiness of those who *meet* in harmony;

two human beings sharing happiness! For them it is the rising of a sun that nothing can darken but the grave.

The doctor bowed his head.

"And then?" he said. "When the grave had taken one of them?"

"Would you wish you had never known the happiness that has given you the greatest sorrow of your life?"

The doctor shook his head. "No! Not if it cost me all eternity in torture."

"Have you ever thought of it before?"

"No," said the doctor. "But I see what you mean. And you are right. It simply comes to this: that we should be grateful for life—grateful and happy for having been allowed to live."

Ormarr nodded. "Happy and grateful—yes. And humble, too."

CHAPTER XII

ORLYGUR and Bagga rode quietly through the mist over the hills from the station to Bolli. There was no need for haste. They rode side by side, keeping close together, holding each other's hands in a clasp that seemed as if it were never to end.

They spoke but little. Each felt, in absence, that there was so much to say. But, on the surface, they were yet as strangers to each other in this, that it was not easy to speak of little trivial things. There was so much that they had not yet known; and their minds were full of a silent, happy longing and anticipation.

Yet they rode there together in the mist, as if it were but natural that they should—as if they already belonged to each other—were already one heart and one soul.

The mist that wrapped them seemed a light and kindly thing.

They did not think how life had played with them but a few hours back, like pawns in a game, or how the mist of the present hour was but a pause while life determined what the next move should be. They rode side by side, holding each other's hand. And neither felt the vaguest glimmer of doubt as to the other's will—the other's love. Both felt that nothing in life could part them now. And the thought of death was far away.

They rode together over the hills, two grey figures in the mist. But there was sunshine in their souls.

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